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Samuel R. Delany Zelazny/Varley/Gibson—and Quality

(Part I)

This essay grows largely from my efforts over the last four years to develop, teach, and refine a course called "Introduction to Science Fiction" at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The notion behind the course is simply that, today, in 1992, science fiction is such a broad field that the idea of "introducing" it over fourteen weeks to a group of readers largely unacquainted with it, who will listen to two weekly lectures and read the equivalent of only some twelve to fourteen books, is simply impossible—if we try to select readings according to any sophisticated notion of historical development or any reasonably representative survey of sf themes. Thus, as I explain to my students in the first lecture, if they come to the sf field as readers more or less unfamiliar with it—and most of them do—it is precisely those sf writers who are more or less well-known—at least as names—outside the field (e.g., Bradbury, Heinlein, Asimov, Clarke, Le Guin, Dick) that we will *not* be reading in the course.

These are the writers that the general social working of popularity and fame have already managed to "introduce" to most people. These are the writers who, as curious readers, my students are most likely to pick up on their own and read—and even enjoy. And though students can all profit from informed study and a more sophisticated understanding of the sf context in which each wrote or writes, it seems unnecessary to spend an introductory course on them. Instead, we use the course to read works of writers most of my class will not have heard of before. The writers we read are writers to whom they can only be introduced by someone knowledgeable in the breadth and history of the sf world. And I only hope that the things I can add in terms of context will be of use should their reading then move, on its own, either to more widely known sf writers (which is likely) or on to sf writers even less well-known in the sf world than these (which will be a rarer occurrence, but is certainly a possibility).

Once we have gotten through the barrier of accessibility, my selection is based wholly on a notion of quality. Quality as I present the idea is not an unanalyzable absolute. Quality has to do with a tension between richness and simplicity, as well as the good old fashioned notions of truth and beauty; above all, it is a social construct that exists as a recognizable aspect of any art only through the interrogations and disagreements of educated minds in argument—in short it functions as a process, not a thing. (It is not a consensual construct, but a conflictual one; though it requires an educated, passionate field for that conflict to be at all productive.)

The course is organized as a series of longer and shorter units, some two weeks long, some three. Each term I select between five and six of these units, out of a possible eight—enough to fill up fourteen weeks. There is a two week short story unit, using two stories apiece by Lucius Shepard, Octavia Butler, and Greg Bear. There is another story unit of three weeks that utilizes two or three stories apiece by Roger Zelazny, John Varley, and William Gibson. Various other units are organized around single writers, usually comprising at least two novels and a handful of stories by each, including Theodore Sturgeon, Alfred Bester, Joanna Russ, Algis Budrys, and Barry Malzberg. Much of the material

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Arthur Byron Cover
A Review of
*The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror:
Fifth Annual Collection*
edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992; \$27.95 hc,
\$15.95 pb; 518 + lxxx pages

In the film *Impromptu*, there's a scene of George Sand watching Delacroix working on a painting of a serene young woman being devoured by a tiger. Noting how well the young lady appears to be taking this unhappy turn of fortune, Sand observes she must be happy to be feeling something. "Even if it's teeth," Delacroix replies.

While not all the stories' worldviews in the fifth volume of Datlow and Windling's *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* can be said to resemble, metaphorically, the young lady of this painting, many do, so many it is perhaps impossible for the intelligent, insightful reader such as myself to come away from this volume without wondering just what implications this mental state of philosophical affairs has for speculative fiction writers, or for that matter, modern civilization in general. Based solely on the evidence here, it's possible the authors are replying to Delacroix's observation with the words "Especially if it's teeth!"

The preponderance of stories containing themes of the consequences of obsessive love, the quest for meaning through sensuality, and the quieter, desperate acceptance of nihilistic means to achieve a specified end, while possibly unintended by the editors, is certainly no coincidence. Good anthologies, even those limited to stories published within the brief timespan of a year, have a tendency to take on lives of their own; stories contrast and play off one another like the themes of a well-constructed symphony, often without much conscious effort on the editors' part. Which doesn't mean there isn't much subconscious effort involved; an editor might select a story or place it in a certain position in the book because it *feels* right, without realizing he's inadvertently creating a reflection of some aspect of his mental landscape or, alternately, arranging a collective vision or literary commen-

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tary on a ripple that happens to be rumbling through the society of fiction writers.

Many of the current leading stars in the specific firmament perceive the current state of the human condition to be in a peculiar kind of anaesthetized Dostoevskian funk, devoid of sense while raging with sensibility. You could even add they're trapped in a Chekhovian quagmire, in search of some Tolstoyan epiphany but willing to settle for a Turgenevian reconciliation. But all in a hip, modern, politically correct fashion, of course. In addition to the more traditional bevy of mythological creatures, heroes and heroines, ghosts, vampires, monsters, and mass-murderers, this collection is festooned not only with the existential dilemmas taken to the literal max, but with victims and perpetrators of child abuse, battering or sexist spouses, pathological artists, and ordinary-seeming individuals with severe sexual dysfunctions or desperate emotional longings. So these stories are issue-oriented and socially involved, and their authors evidently passionately devoted to their ambition to change the world for the better with the sincerity of their opinions and the depth of their insights on today's fragmented, entropic culture. In this regard, the authors are the spiritual heirs of the sixties' "New Wave" writers, but with a few significant differences. Back then in the good old days, you young whippersnapper, sex, drugs, and rock and roll were painless vehicles of rebellious pleasure; merely to indulge was for many an act of defiance against the blue-noses whose all retentive notions of morality were holding back the evolution of the human race, or something like that. But in today's world of AIDS, crack, cocaine, and sterile commercialism, authors are considerably more ambivalent toward the subjects of fornication, medication and syncope (all suspect activities unless you're personally involved, of course). Furthermore, despite the extravagant visions, even the Gothic spectacle involved here, an underlying plea or desire for moderation in all things permeates the blank areas between the lines of these texts. Collectively the authors appear to be striving toward "safe and sane" fiction. They may be heirs of the "New Wave," but *Volume V* of this series is no spiritual heir to the two *Dangerous Visions* books or to Moorcock's *New Worlds* retrospectives. On the other hand, those stories founded on the

aesthetic principles of the more unsettling fog of conservative compromise, philosophically, commercially, and imaginatively, hangs over this book, as if the field's *genre* is trying to have it both ways, and achieving neither end. To put it bluntly, too many of these stories wear braces.

This trend is exemplified by the Cadigan and Koja entries. The main impression I got from Cadigan's "Home by the Sea" is that the author's sleeves were seriously rolled up, she was really trying to do something here with her idea of a vampires-at-the-end-of-the-world story. She was also trying to do something really hard, which is write about bored people at loose ends and make it interesting at the same time. "Home by the Sea" takes place during what appears to be an entropic winding down of both human culture and the human race. Civilization and culture mean nothing when people have become so "dead" they feel no pain when they cut themselves, do not heal but do not suffer when they are maimed, and do not die even when their braces are severed from their bodies. The heroine is bored out of her skull, she needs to feel something. And that's where the vampires—with their teeth—enter. Cadigan pulls an old switcheroo with humanity being basically undead and the vampires being the givers of a form of life. But the heroine's passive please-act-upon-me nature, which befits not only the atmosphere but the conventions of the horror genre, prevents the story from being as involving as others with similar philosophical themes. Perhaps a real plot, rather than a series of expository scenes and revelations, might have made a difference.

A more contemporary examination of existential despair is found in Kathe Koja's "Angels in Love," in this instance a portrait of a music shop clerk who's had more than her curiosity aroused by the intriguing nocturnal sounds made by the couple next door. Unfortunately, Datlow overpraised this story in her introduction, stating that it "perfectly captures the voice of a certain class of American—what many call 'poor white trash'." If being a poor, overweight drinker and smoker prone to picking up guys in bars made young women basically yearning out in life "poor white trash," then I can't help but wonder what we're supposed to call all those ignorant, inbred white folks who live in chicken shacks and drink moonshine and eat moonpies in the deep

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South or in the Allegheny Mountains where I come from. I suppose I'm quibbling—it's an important point of honor with me to note that people with low or no class ain't automatically trash—but I think Koja merely meant her heroine to be an average, frustrated young woman doomed to be downwardly mobile in the most metaphysical sense of the phrase. That said, Koja writes well enough about an "average" person, but unfortunately not all the journeyman skills she can muster can salvage the clichéd "shock" ending of this one.

The writing in her second entry in this book, "Teratians"—a brief portrait of a dysfunctional family having trouble living on the run with a cannibal in their midst—isn't nearly as competent. She shifts viewpoints and techniques throughout the narrative almost randomly. Often the point of view is so subjective the sentences take the form of images in clipped phrases like those in a beat poem. It's an interesting experiment but is entirely unwarranted by the straightforward characterization and the slight, almost nonexistent storyline. The ending, when it comes, is of the okay-I'm-finished-with-this-idea-now variety. But questions of quality aside, "Teratians," with its theme of the difficulty of finding a place in a world without peace or fulfillment because of the imperfection and beastly instincts inside, personified in the story by a cannibal, fits rather nicely into the complicated mood of this anthology.

Although heavily dominated by the presence of artifice in favor of art, K.W. Jeter's "True Love" is far more successful at exploring the grotesqueries of negative or perverted social and ethical values. Koja describes a dysfunctional family that runs out of steam trying to hold itself together; Jeter describes a dysfunctional family that knows how to make its sacrifices for love successful. The fact that those sacrifices include procuring helpless young boys for a senile, weak vampire to feast on twists all notions of family love over, under, and sideways down. In this story the horror is derived from the means the heroine will go to in order to maintain the fulfillment she already possesses. In a way it's too bad the Iron Curtain has fallen; I'd love to see what sort of economic allegory about capitalism a social realist, Party-hack critic would make of the youth-for-subsistence plot device of "True Love."

In contrast, the heroine of Lisa Mason's "Hummers" is doomed to remain unfulfilled, mainly because she's doomed, dying of ovarian cancer, a death for which the author pointedly places responsibility on the character's shoulders because down through the years she touched herself "there," for one reason or another, with nicotine-stained fingers thanks to her smoking habit. To make matters worse, she waited too long after the pain to see her doctor. Perhaps the author is trying to tell us something, or perhaps the subject matter of a person's last few days was so grim the author needed to distance herself from it, needed to feel superior in some way to her heroine, as if to say "this won't happen to me, and shouldn't happen to you." Mason needn't worry; I may ultimately die of many causes, but it's safe to say ovarian cancer won't be one of them. "Hummers" is not a story intended for escapism or pure enjoyment; it's definitely a case of art for art's sake. In this case, however, a subtle bit of artifice would have gone a long way. It's a brave effort though, and I should note here that Dozois published it in *Slivers* and Windling selected it for this book even though it fails to conform to the genre requirements of both the magazine and this volume. I think of it as a death/sawtooth transformation story—

—as opposed to the dismemberment/transformation theme of Grant Morrison's "The Braille Encyclopedia," a Clive Barker imitation/homage containing a one-dimensional blind heroine and a secret Hellfire Club-type organization of deaf, dumb, and blind perverts whose scarred bodies record all the sadistic atrocities you could possibly read via touch during a mad, mad orgy of freakish desire. The writing isn't bad, but the arc of the dramatic structure is so traditional, so predictable, that this might as well be horror-by-the-numbers. Perhaps I may be taking things too seriously in what is intended, after all, as a minor shocker, but I can't help wondering what these hedonistic perverts do during their off hours, how they get along, what they do for a living, etc. Surely this is one secret club whose members must receive a lot of government subsidies; so me dedicated bureaucrat, like the heroine of that Japanese movie *A Taxing Woman*, is bound to notice. Indeed, does the devil render to Rome what is Rome's?

As in "The Braille Encyclopedia" and a few other stories in this

book, the traditional horror dramatic arc is plainly evident in Karl Edward Wagner's "The Kind Men Like," which continues his tendency of putting his heroine's varied orifices to as many uses as possible. Definitely one of the "pulp" stories in this volume, it follows the efforts of a young woman to find the whereabouts of her long-lost mother, a Betty Page-type pin-up girl of the fifties era who, unlike the real Page who from all accounts became a Bum Again Christian after fading from public view, went in the opposite direction. The social satire and commentary contained in "The Kind Men Like" lift it above the ordinary.

The Morrison and Wagner stories were both originally published in the Gelb-Garret anthology *Heater Blood*; S.P. Somtow's "Choi Choi" was first published in *The Unlabeled Frankenstein* but wouldn't have been out of place in that book either, especially since it uses that same dramatic arc. It too contains over-the-top horrific/sexual imagery, but with an easily detachable deadpan sense of humor. Somtow satirizes the conventions of horror fiction with his ideas even as he pays fidelity to it with his form. He plays it straighter, though still with an occasional wink, with "The Pavilion of Frozen Women," which concerns itself with the hunt for a serial murderer who just might be a famous snow sculptor. Despite its reliance on TV-style dramatic conversations, "Pavilion" is a complicated orchestration of disparate themes—majority/minority race relations, the connection, if any, between great art and banal violence, the contrast between different individuals' attitudes toward their own sexuality, and the transient nature of both art and life, all interwoven into a critique of the smugness and air of superiority to be found in Japanese society—is truly outstanding, an example of high craft verging on art.

Somtow's control contrasts markedly with Poppo Z. Brite's pathetically overwrought "The Ash of Memory, the Dust of Desire," a tale of a romantic if not obsessive love triangle that strives for realistic pathos but degenerates into overwritten bathos from the second paragraph. If Ellison or Malzberg wrote Harlequin romance novels, perhaps the results would read something like this story, only the characters and the situations would be more interesting. What makes "Ash" a horror story, other than the very fact of its existence, is the utterly contrived, absolutely nonsensical, straight-from-left-field encounter of the female lead with a magical meat hook in an abandoned factory. Torn between two lovers, one subconsciously (perhaps) sees to it that she is literally torn thanks to the secret magic of the urban sprawl. In search of an abortion, she herself is out out of city living. None of this is exactly what I'd call deep thinking, and again, the very arbitrariness of this plot device, which like bad pulp solves a real problem in an unreal way, sinks this otherwise sophomoric effort into the literary basement.

The horror stories remaining to be discussed don't necessarily fulfill all the criteria I've established for my thesis in this review—David Morrell's "The Beautiful Uncut Hair of Graves" is hardly about obsessive love—but they often support its more purely philosophical elements. Morrell narrates in second person the story of a man who upon the death of his parents discovers he isn't Jewish after all, and he embarks on a journey to learn how he came to be adopted, and from what manner of orphanage. It's important that the protagonist's adopted folks be Jewish, for while people were looking the other way when Jews were being hounded and rounded up in Nazi Germany, the American characters in this story were demonstrating that looking the other way when it's in your self-interest isn't the exclusive province of the "evil." Having once seen a documentary on an utterly repulsive "respectable" member of society who for several decades kidnapped children so they could be adopted into innocent families, I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn the revelations about the abortion/adoption agency the protagonist discovers were based completely on historical fact. This is one horror story without a supernatural element because one isn't needed. The cruelty of the human race is capable of providing enough raw inspiration sufficient to fill a thousand volumes.

A.R. Morlan's "The Second Most Beautiful Woman in the World" is about the netherworld where obsessive love and obsessive greed intersect. The idea is nifty: in an effort to gain some publicity for his southwestern burger stand, the owner sponsors a contest—whichever can touch a camper for the longest period of time gets to keep the camper. The narrator, who moved to New Mexico because of his love for his personal image of Georgia O'Keeffe, finds himself particularly interested in a particularly determined old woman taking part in the contest. The author's efforts at waxing poetic are too visible at times, but the central

Read This

Recently read and recommended by *Frederik Pohl:*

When you have a book-a-day habit you chew up a lot of paper over a month's time, and most of it, sadly, turns out to be hardly worth the while of remembering. Still, there are half a dozen or so that, for one reason or another, struck me as interesting over the past few weeks, and here they are:

I really wanted to like *Huxley in Hollywood* by David King Dunaway (Harper & Row), because Aldous Huxley is at least a minor godlet in my personal literary pantheon. I didn't entirely make it. Dunaway's style grates (he stretches for the mot juste and all too often winds up with the mot clanger) and, annoyingly in any non-fiction book, in the very few cases where I had independent knowledge of what he was writing about—that is, without going to the trouble of looking anything up—he got it wrong. (Silly, peripheral little things, mostly—he put the wrong ending on the movie *Things to Come*, for instance—but they are the things that shake a body's confidence.) Still, I hadn't known until I read Dunaway's book just how humbly Huxley abased himself to get the money that came from script-writing jobs (for, example, a proposed Mr. Magoo cartoon—a particularly grotesque episode when you bear in mind that, eyesight-wise, Huxley was a veritable Mr. Magoo himself), or about his involvement with L. Ron Hubbard in Dianetics. I could have wished to hear a lot more in that area, because what Dunaway provides is titillating: he quotes from a Huxley letter that described Hubbard as “a very queer fellow—very clever, rather immature . . . and in some ways rather pathetic; for he is curiously repellant physically and is probably always conscious of the fact.” Well, that doesn't square with my own recollections of Hubbard, either—in my view, Hubbard could have raised charm to sell—but there it is. Wonder what Hubbard thought of Huxley!

I'm not as familiar with the works of Joyce Carol Oates as I would like to be, so I was quick to read her new *Black Water* (Dutton). It's a very short novel (162 loosely packed pages), so reading it could hardly be called a waste of time. Still, it's not one of her better jobs. Oates is retelling the story of Teddy Kennedy at Chappaquiddick (with fictitious names, to make it fiction), and although she tells it beautifully she's telling us nothing we haven't known all along.

In *Harlot's Ghost* Norman Mailer is telling us a true story massaged into fiction, too, but he has a bigger story to tell. The real-life equivalent of “Harlot” is the CIA's strange head counterspy, James Jesus Angleton, who single-handedly destroyed (or purified, depending on whose story you believe) the CIA's best sources of Soviet intelligence over a period of decades, by taking the word of one defector that all other

defectors were KGB plants. I'm a Mailer fan. I've read every book the man ever wrote (well, not counting his unreadable *Why We Are in Vietnam*) and this, I think, is close to his best ever.

The most curious thing about the only other “mainstream” novel that made an impression lately was I had no idea it was going to be mainstream. That's Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* (Tor Fairy Tales). It's a beauty, maybe the best of Yolen's very good lot to date. *Briar Rose* is told through the eyes of a young woman who is trying to find out the truth about her odd and dear late grandmother's obsession with the story of Sleeping Beauty. Although I loved it, I kept thinking there are going to be some seriously surprised eight-year-old girls around who, expecting a fairy tale, get Nazi gas chambers instead.

Happens I was reading an unusually high proportion of sf and fantasy lately, and three of those stick out. Sheri S. Tepper's *Beauty* is another Sleeping Beauty story, but there is nothing mainstream about this one; it is wholly fantasy (with even a hint of science fiction). If Tepper had asked me in advance I would have told her that retelling just about every fairy tale ever told as the story of a single young woman was one of the dumbest ideas I'd ever heard. Fortunately she didn't ask me. *Beauty* is beautifully done, and Tepper continues to elbow her way into my short list of favorites. Eleanor Aronson's *A Woman of the Iron People* (Morrow) is about as good a First Contact story as I've ever read, and *Buddy Holly Is Alive and Well on Ganymede* by Bradley Denton (Morrow) is a bizarrely funny farce that succeeded in giving me real pleasure in spite of the fact that I loathe rock music and had no real idea of who this Buddy Holly was.

Finally, one other sf novel that isn't anywhere near as good as the ones above, but thrust itself into my attention by its cover blurb. It is *Far-Seer* by Robert J. Sawyer (Ace), and its blurb said: “This is the novel that Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke and Frederik Pohl would have written if they had pooled their skills in their prime.” Well, that sounded pretty promising. Since it is a tragic historical fact that Arthur, Bob and I never did get around to pooling our talents, and now it's too late, I was grateful for the chance to see what that unlikely mind-meld might have been produced. I don't think I found out. Whatever we might have written would not, I think, have been likely to be this book, which is actually a novel of Harry Harrison-type intelligent dinosaurs on a not very probable extrasolar planet. Still, it's not bad; and where would any of us be if we were held to account for the effusions of blurb writers?

image of the story is original and quite evocative. Whether it is horrific or beautiful depends upon the reader's point of view.

Throughout this volume there's a tendency on some authors' part to look backward as a way of looking forward. Robert Holdstock and Garry Kilworth simply look backward in “The Ragithorn,” easily the most “classical” horror tale the editors have selected. This one is so good it may indeed come to be regarded as a classic. The authors clearly intended it to be neo-classic. Narrated in the form of the journal entries of an obsessive scholar in the Lovecraftian tradition, “The Ragithorn” mixes and matches “literary fragments” from various versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, Chaucer, *Hamlet*, and elsewhere to lend a weighty air of verisimilitude to the scholar's search for the secret of immortal life. When all the proper conditions are met, any corpse buried among the tangled roots of the ragithorn tree will rise from the dead. The scholar's efforts to discover and then live up to the demands of the secret

ritual constitute the thrust of this creative and well-written story, and the last line has a savage wit straight out of the zinger tradition epitomized by Robert Bloch.

Patrick McGrath's “The Snell” is a minor but effective effort at psychological horror in the tradition of Poe, and while I liked it well enough, it made me wonder about these stories narrated in first person by characters who turn out to be dead at the end. Just who are they talking to—and how? “The Tenth Door” by Steve Rasnic Tem and Melanie Tem is a what's-Dracula-doling-in-the-modern-age story that's too short for its own good. While the premise is decent, the pacing is rushed, and the entire thing is dramatically stillborn. Steve Rasnic Tem fares better in his solo effort, “At the End of the Day,” an unsettling mood piece about a UPS or Federal Express driver who has one final package to deliver, but can't find the address to leave it. This is an existentialist dilemma story with a long tradition behind it—a good

example is Thomas M. Disch's "Descending"—only instead of going down a never-ending flight of stairs, this protagonist is trapped diving up and down city streets in an eternal twilight, forever waiting the time when he can go home and rejoin his family. The nine-to-five's ultimate nightmare, beautifully written.

Like "The Kind Men Like" or "The Ragthorn," Norman Partridge's "The Cut Man" is solidly in the *Weird Tales*/pulp tradition; its tough boxing atmosphere reminds me of something Robert E. Howard might have written, although in keeping with the general character of the narrator, Partridge's prose is bleaker and more world-weary than Howard's tended to be, even when it described epic bloody scenes. "The Cut Man" contains none of the raw, exciting fight sequences Howard used in his own handful of boxing stories; instead, it's a grisly tale of woodoo, of the limits of loyalty and bravery, and of the sacrifices some people make to survive, and as such, it's unexceptional but also fairly entertaining.

The simple directness, in the most positive sense, of "Mama Gone" by Jane Yolen reminds me of Alexei Tolstoy's "The Family of a Voudalak," which despite its folklore origins is even more complicated than this vampire story evidently intended for the young adult market. In keeping with the social responsibility of today's times (can't have negative role models polluting children's lit, can we?), at a critical moment the vampire moon possesses just enough instinctive devotion to her offspring to refrain from doing the deed, but the tale delivers a few wholesome chills anyway, even to critics with jaded taste such as myself.

"The Visitors' Book" by Stephen Gallagher is an example of the "quiet horror" subgenre, and in its own way this is one vacation, back-to-nature story that outdoes every urban-paranoia story in this book. With the exception of one incident, which could happen anytime to anybody, "The Visitors' Book" recounts a horror derived from synchronous observations and events. The fact that the characters are visiting a vacation cabin in Europe where they don't speak the native language increases their isolation from the society of man, and makes them even more vulnerable to the indifference of nature. Like much horror fiction, though in a less overt melodramatic way, "The Visitors' Book" is propelled by the conceptual breakthrough that man individually and as a race has no control over his fate.

Likewise in Dennis Etchison's "Call Home," an hilarious deadpan vignette about a man who helps a strange child who appears to be in deep trouble, only to suffer social ostracism when the child tricks his friends into believing he is abusing her! Talk about your dark fantasy—this one has enough black humor to fill a black hole. But judging from my response to some of the stories that are supposed to be out-and-out hilarious (I know; I'm getting ahead of myself), it's questionable whether Dzelow and Windling even noticed this one was funny.

"Blood" by Janice Galloway is an inconsequential meditation on teeth and art, music and ivory; it has all the faults of "literary writing" with few of the virtues. "Dogstar Man" by Nancy Willard is an interesting conventional ghost story about a man who raises dogs and who's named Olaf Start—makes me wonder if it's supposed to be an oblique nod toward Olaf Stapledon. In any case, the story is well done, an enjoyable read with a touching ending. Joanne Greenberg's "Persistence of Memory" is a tedious tale of heckfire and damnation, the eminently forgettable allegory of a prison inmate who gives up his memories to a representative of the devil. Thomas Ligotti's "The Glamour" is a well-written mood piece, definitely a case of too much talent working on too slight an idea. I could almost say the same about Ramsey Campbell's "The Same in Any Language," another one of his patented existential doom stories—his philosophy of how the higher, unseen forces will find and get you sooner or later is reminiscent of Hemingway's toward death in general. Campbell has created his own dramatic arc and stuck to it *ad nauseum*, but the truth in criticism act compels me to observe that the author who commits the crime of dramatic repetition must invariably be pardoned when he's able to create, even in literary shorthand, characters you care about. One pardon, coming up.

The fantasy selections in this volume tend to fall into a handful of predictable categories: traditional high and low fantasy with swords-men, kingdoms, magic, etc.; the by-now-not-so-new breed of highly individualistic fantasy as exemplified by the tradition codified by Terry

Carr's *New Worlds of Fantasy* series from the sixties, a branch of the *Unknown* tree; and the highly literary fantasy that follows the dramatic conventions and experimental modes of mainstream writing, usually written by mainstream authors whose literary models are impressionists or surrealists who stand apart from the traditions of the sf/fantasy/horror genre, even if they happen to use upon occasion identical themes or gimmicks. Again, many of the plot elements are identical to those in the horror stories, so although a certain type of purist might think my division of the book into two sections for review is slightly arbitrary, thematically it remains a whole.

The very title of Ellen Kushner's "The Swordsman Whose Name Was Not Death" tips off the reader to expect the unexpected. Its setting is an exotic no-man's-land in the middle of a medieval-type city, but its characters have names like Richard and Alec and Missy. Everybody talks like real folks, Richard and Alec are a happy pair of homosexual lovers, and Kushner does her damndest to toss all the conventions of heroic fiction high in the air and let them land pretty much where they may. The story contains modern psychological realism and for this reason commands a

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Judith Moffitt:



1992 is my year of homesteading in the Philadelphia suburbs (and of writing a book about the experience), and I've read almost nothing but homesteading books for months. Of these I can particularly recommend the following:

Raising the Home Duck Flock by Dave Holdreder and *Ducks and Geese in Your Backyard* by Rick and Gail Luttmann. These two volumes saved my life just recently when the hatchery screwed up and sent me seven little black Cayuga ducklings a month before they were supposed to arrive. Everything the unprepared beginner needs to know, thank God, and then some.

Hive Management by Richard Bonney and *Keeping Bees* by John Vivian. This, my second season of beekeeping, was my first spring of trying to keep my hives from swarming. I've got a whole shelf of beekeeping books, but these two are my favorites. (But I have to tell you, they swarmed anyway. Twice.)

Payne Hollow by Hadrian Hubbard. The author, who died in 1988, had been a friend of mine from my college days. He and his wife were homesteaders in Kentucky for three decades—the first I ever knew of, though Scott and Helen Nearing's landmark back-to-the-land book *Living the Good Life* (about their Vermont homestead) was published in the fifties, right about the same time Harlan and his wife Anna were settling in at Payne Hollow. Harlan was a fine writer whose prose style puts Helen Nearing's firmly in the shade. For anybody at all interested in how a couple of intelligent and cultured people could joyfully choose to live without modern conveniences, I can't recommend this book highly enough. (Footnote: two characters in my new novel, *Time, Like an Ever-Rolling Stream*, are based on the Hubbards in the same way that this homesteading year of mine is based on their life.)

Finally, two fantasy novels I did manage to read (and am very glad I did):

Cloven Hooves by Megan Lindholm. The Alaska childhood sections are so powerfully rendered they somewhat upstage later events, but the whole book is a very good read.

Flying in Place by Susan Palwick. A ghost story dealing with child sexual abuse. Read this to find out what father-daughter incest feels like from the daughter's perspective. Outside and in, a beautifully crafted book. ▴

certain amount of attention, but the plot is too slight, really, to withstand all this innovation, and in the final analysis it's a good effort that remains just that. In many ways the various resolutions are unfinished, either because the author wanted to leave the reader with the feeling that life goes on without tidiness, or because this story may be a chapter of a longer work.

Midon Snyder's "Vivian," originally published in Martin H. Greenberg's *The Fantastic Adventures of Robin Hood*, an anthology published to capitalize on the major motion picture release starring Kevin Costner as *Robin Hood*, merges the conventions of the modern legend with psychological realism and the beliefs of Druidic mysticism. Its approach to the character (who had been basically forgotten for hundreds of years until Sir Walter Scott revived him as a supporting cast member of *Ivanhoe*) is as innovative in its way as Richard Lester's film *Robin and Marian* was sixteen years ago. While "Vivian" 's architecture is a little weak in spots, its portrait of Robin Hood as a desperate hero willing to risk his life in a contest against the tree gods of the forest, and then all too willing to compromise his ideals in order to maintain the success he has achieved, against all odds makes him one of the most memorable characters in the volume. I admit it. I was impressed.

"Queen Christina and the Windsurfer," by Alison Fell appears to be a reaction against Disney's saccharine *Little Mermaid* movie. Fell looks backward to the spirit of the original source material, but she doesn't stop at the fairy tale tradition, she tells a modern Greek myth instead, the story of Poseidon's daughter and what happens when she falls in love with a bearded surfer. The results include a transformation as tragic as any the ancient Greeks imagined, and the modern reader experiences the peculiar displacement of the world of the fantastic intersecting with the world of the real. A well done story.

Kara Dalkey's "The Peony Lantern," an updated retelling of an ancient Chinese folk tale updated by the Japanese writer Eicho for his audience in 1884, is somewhat less successful, mainly because I found the writing insufficiently powerful. Even so, the story has its moments. Easily the best story in this tradition, though, is C. J. Cherryh's "Gwydion and the Dragon," which despite a few rough spots is an exceedingly well-told coming-of-age story. Both the Cherryh and the Dalkey entries, incidentally, completely contradict my theses, as the worlds they create have little to do with the sordid day-to-day realities of our modern age. But by the time the reader encounters them, the book has already taken shape.

For the second story in the volume, a New-Worlds-of-Fantasy type, is a veritable feast of sordid reality. "In Carnation" by Nancy Springer recounts the adventures of a sensual cat goddess who transforms into a human—or at least into a human appearance—and becomes a stripper at a sleazy carnival. This story contains many of the same ingredients as its companion horror stories—sexual content, the interaction between the fantastic and the mundane, and a quest for either a meaningful existence or a good time, whichever comes first—only in this case the final soufflé is innocent and colorful, like a "forties" cinema adaptation of a Damon Runyon piece. It was pleasant and amusing enough, and since I like cats, I very much enjoyed Springer's portrait of a cat goddess on leave from hibernation.

Fred Chappell's "The Somewhere Doors" is a psychological fantasy—there are unreal elements, such as a woman from the future and FBI agents who think the protagonist, Arthur Strakl, a pulp writer who's also a short order cook at a poor grill in North Carolina during the Depression years and World War II, may be a traitor to his country—but the real story is how Arthur learns to accept the tremendous chasm between the world of his dreams and the world of the mundane. In a way Strakl is a Lovecraftian figure—in the future he will go down in history as one of the most important visionary authors of his century, but with the exception of a few individuals who can perceive the greater literary values in the lurid sci-fi of the pulps, the world he lives in now will neither note nor suspect his vast and mighty talents. Chappell's technical skill in this piece are considerable, and in many ways the story is quite original, but philosophically—and this is what Chappell is building up to, a philosophical point—it's all been said before. The moral may bear repeating, and Chappell repeats it well, but it appears that as an artist he has only begun to wrestle with his own vision.

Which is more than Terry Bisson has done in "The Coon Suit."

Now I know this story is a big hit that's very popular with both readers with professional credentials and those who are mere consumers, but the truth is this story is a bomb of nuclear proportions. Luckily it's also a dud. An allegory of race relations that revolves around a narrator who watches a coon hunt only to discover, slowly, inexorably, he is the object of the hunt because—as he belatedly realizes—he's still wearing his coon suit, its minimal shock effect and its limp-wristed grab at social commentary depends utterly on the author deliberately withholding pertinent information from the reader. This is the only selection so conceptually amateurish I felt its inclusion was embarrassing. The coon wears no clothes.

"Peter" by Pat Murphy falls nearly as flat, mainly because her prose recounts an intriguing, emotional situation so flatly it quickly becomes monotonous, and the story isn't that long to begin with. It tells us what happened to Peter, Wendy, and the Lost Boys, as seen through the eyes of Slightly, after they all left Never-Neverland to become grown-ups. It too contrasts the world of fantasy with the facts of mundania, but, in keeping with the points made by pontificating shrinks on the tube, does point out the deaths of Hook's pirates in the book were not as painless and bloodless as Barrie's book would have us believe. "Peter" contains the germ of a good idea—having recently read the original novel for the first time, I was ready to go with it as far as Murphy wanted to go—but unfortunately she decided to take it nowhere. The conclusion, if I may call it that, is strictly of the I'm-finished-with-this-idea-now variety, and it's a trait just as unsatisfying here as in Koja's "Teratians."

Charles de Lint's "Our Lady of the Harbour" contains, among other elements, a backward/revisionist look at the mermaid legend, a mermaid who becomes human because she has fallen in love, and a musician whose only salvation is his art. Although the mermaids in this story are considerably more horrific than those we've grown used to in bowdlerized legend and fairy tale, and although much of the story is told from the point of view of the mermaid or that of musician Amy Scallan, the focal point of the entire operation is the object of their affections, Matt Casey, who is basically a cross between Bob Dylan and John Renbourn but who also is so psychologically impaired that despite his artistic brilliance he is completely unable to interact meaningfully with the human race, even with, or I should say, especially with his occasional lovers. People have too much teeth for this guy. Once again, certain similar literary themes are prominent, though it must be emphasized that de Lint is a superior craftsman whose work possesses a unique sensibility. More than most authors north of the Rio Grande, he is able to draw upon the myth and spirit of the landscape (here the Northwest) and create fantasies with an original flavor; yet the fantasy elements never override the importance of his main agenda, which is to tell a story of character. He has been called a North American magic realist, which I think is mistaking the case as his technique and basic approach fit in comfortably in the genre mode, but it's worth noting the suspense of "Our Lady" is derived not from the simple romantic question of whether the lovers will overcome their travails, but from the more complex question of whether Matt will allow his emotions to allow him to experience redemption and growth. The answer doesn't deviate significantly from that of other stories presented in this volume. Again similar building blocks have been put together in a completely variant way only to form another structure with a similar function.

Illusions shatter quickly in "Santa's Way" by James Powell, in which it's revealed Santa Claus has been having an affair with a cheap floozy who shoots him when she's tired of playing second fiddle to his career. The social value of giving naughty kids free toys, even though that smacks suspiciously of socialism, is given a freewheeling debate in this, the only genuine kneelapper in the volume. The editors have chosen a few other theoretically humorous pieces—"The Afternoon of June 8, 1991" by Ian Frazer, the transcription of an exorist being possessed, and "You'll Never Eat Lunch on This Continent Again" by Adam Gopnik, a satire of California culture during the dinosaur era—but they both struck me as staggeringly unfunny. The editors also chose Nancy Willard's amusing poem, "Fish, Pooh, Said Hieronymus Bosch," but I can't help but suspect its impact will be somewhat diminished on readers unfamiliar with its solo publication accompanied by those brilliant—and humorous—illustrations by Diane and Leo Dillon. Overall Volume 7 of this series contains a paucity of sheer silliness that either means the editors don't really go for it, or the better authors have

been taking themselves a mite too seriously lately. I realize slapstick horror story might be an oxymoron, but since so much writing is inadvertently funny these days, maybe some authors would be well-advised to start working toward their strengths.

Both the editors and many authors do have a well-developed taste for irony rather than outright humor and satire. Gloria Ericson's "The Witch of Wilton Falls," which resides in that nebulous purgatory between mimetic fiction and horror and fantasy fiction, contains so many dramatic ironies they hang on the underbelly of its plot like barnacles. This story revolves around the wistful reminiscences of a man remembering the summer when he had been a hero; but the facts leading up to his moment of glory, once considered in all their implications, put the severe kibosh on his judgment and pride. "Witch" takes the stuff of supermarket tabloids—specifically keeping a relative or "loved" one imprisoned in a cage in the basement for a few decades—and attempts to spin a fabric realistic and poignant. A certain amount of social commentary is implied—presumably the helpless wife would not have been forced to put her drunken, abusive husband in a cage if during the Depression they'd had organizations to rescue battered wives and children like they do today—and a certain amount of allegory is achieved: we all become accustomed to our cages, and the concept of freedom can be just as fearsome as the concept of change. But the main focus is the irony, among them the narrator's feelings that the husband's and wife's mutual moral quagmires in truth provides them both with happiness and salvation, that instead of having been a hero, he had been in fact a naïve heel.

I was thinking of labeling "The Witch of Wilton Falls" a quiet fantasy. Indeed, it's a fantastic work although every incident in it is conceivably quite possible. Perhaps if the story had taken place in Colombia or Brazil, and had been written by an heir to mounds of García Márquez or Fuentes, I would have branded it with the iron of magic realism and shrugged my shoulders with the self-assured feeling I'd figured *this* one out. The more complicated truth is the story serves as an easily accessible bridge between the various other sorts of fantasies presented here. These stories never would have been published in Campbell's *Unknown*; they don't have to be logical or make sense or possess rational extrapolations about the fantastic or the surreal. They don't even have to have characters or a plot. In some cases, all they have to do is be. Darlow and Windling turn to this sort of fiction quite often in their series, even though the results are often like dropping some funky, folksy Soweto pop song in the middle of a heavy metal set, or breaking up a Brahms symphony with a few bars of Philip Glass.

"The Monster" by Nina Kerrell (translated from the Russian by Bernard Meares), demonstrates my point in a friendly way. Like "The Witch of Wilton Falls" its theme is the burden uncivilized masculinity places on the shoulders and the spirit of organized, responsible, sensitive, nurturing women, but its approach is fully in keeping with the literary tradition of the absurd, particularly that brand unique to the artist of the former Soviet State and Eastern Europe who specializes in satire, surreal whimsy. So instead of a woman who cages her husband to protect her child and down through the years calls her hairy, unkempt charge "the Bear," in "The Monster" the shaggy beast is assigned the woman's apartment due to a bureaucratic snafu, and in time his presence takes the place of the presumably more civilized uncle, who some years earlier was turned into an aluminum snupecan. "The Witch" imprisoned her man to gain control; the shaggy monster, who in a manner of speaking is imprisoned with the women, represents a familiar source of chaos—he torments the narrator, causing her to trip over a pet cat even though they have no cat, fills the bathtub with frogs and news, freezes the apartment with his breath when he's annoyed. In both stories, though, the forces of femininity come to be emotionally dependent on their unruly captives. "The Monster," incidentally, is excellent.

"The Poisoned Story" by Rosario Ferré also deals with the salvation of the masculine via its dependency on the feminine, but places it in a more complicated social context. Its point of view shifts between Rosaura's version of how she came to be the wife of a wealthy widower, and the version of the same events as believed to be true by the local gossips and newspaper writers. As the brief story progresses, the shifting takes place more rapidly, Rosaura discovers the small-minded newspaper writer is altering the order of events to suit his own minor league

purposes, and the whole story takes on a surreal turn, concluding in a narrative loop. It takes a helluva writer to pull off a stunt like this, and an even better writer to make the stunt subservient to a larger purpose. Ferré makes what could have been a dreary academic exercise a living, breathing work.

Both "The Monster" and "The Poisoned Story" are literary works in the best sense of the term. Even if they hadn't been successful, their point would have been plain, which is more than I can say for the unsuccessful "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" by Sandra Cisneros, a "humorous" piece solidly in the tradition of the Frazier and Gopnik selections. I can't pretend to have been able to read it straight through so I could grok, however dimly, what the author was getting at. My mind kept wandering because reading it felt too much like work. Obviously the story is completely at fault here.¹

Easily the best story in *Vf*, and the most beautifully written, is Kobo Abe's "The Life of a Poet." This allegory of economics and art, and birth and rebirth simply blows away the rest of the contents like a hurricane. This is no slight against the other authors represented here either; it's just that comparing their work to Abe's is like comparing Salieri's to Beethoven's. One author who is bent but not broken by Abe's hurricane is Carol Emshwiller; her story "Moon Songs," a parable about truth in artistic endeavor which bears some resemblance to a tragic version of the cartoon "One Froggy Evening," packs a wallop while defying categorization.

The final story in the book, "The Ogre's Wife" by Pierrette Fleutiaux (translated from the French by Leigh Haefrey), attempts to take the traditional stuff of fairy tales, put a feminist spin on them, and then defy categorization with a flurry of surreal symbolism. As such, the story personifies many of the strengths and weaknesses the volume contains as a whole. Most of these have to do with the book's retro quasi-moralistic view of human nature and activity, and certainly in this story a woman's deepest fears about her conventional role in society literally come to life. Fleutiaux deals better with her angst at the futility of housekeeping and motherhood in an untenable situation than she does with the ultimate resolution, during which her heroine presumably arrives at some sort of epiphany when she meets a childlike male she can put in her pocket, that is, whom she can control. I don't doubt, however, Fleutiaux approached her task with the utter assurance of her convictions, but what emerges is of necessity mere propaganda and cannot be art. "The Ogre's Wife" is a very dissatisfying conclusion to a volume that, despite its many excellent tales, reveals the current state of the art, as it were, to be problematic at best, as if all this courage of liberal (but not necessarily liberated) intentions has resulted in naught but tenuous conclusions, because, I think, the very assumptions behind them have gone unquestioned.

As for the reasons why, Darlow herself provides a clue when she writes in her brief introduction to the Fleutiaux story, "The Ogre's Wife": "... was seduced by an angel who turns into a monster overnight. Isn't that an apt commentary on the sex act and sexual relationships through time . . . ? Well, no, not exclusively. Maybe not even particularly. This remark casually transforms the specific into a yardstick for general truth, and consequently, I seriously doubt it applies to most people. I mean, I may pick my nose after sex, but that hardly means I'm suffering a breakdown in toilet training (thus symbolically becoming monstrous), does it? It seems the editors make as many unquestioned assumptions as do the writers.


And while we're at it, are we talking about men who turn into monsters, or have women managed to exorcise that little potential shortcoming from their nature sometime while I was refraining from eating my little green goblins? We all know the answer to that, but you wouldn't know it from this book. The polemics in this volume are very one-sided while the conflicts between the sexes are concerned, one-sided and, I think, very reactive rather than intellectual or intuitive or insightful. It's as if the authors forgot they were supposed to be writing about individuals who wouldn't necessarily conform to their preconceived opinions about the world and therefore wouldn't permit them to act in any unpredictable, surprising, contradictory fashion, the way

¹This story was dropped at the last minute because of a permissions problem. Interested readers can find it in Cisneros's collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (Random House).—RKK

people do occasionally in real life. Even the people in the de Linx piece, perhaps the best in the depth of its characterization, do not deviate in any way from the program once the general outlines of their personalities have been established. Perhaps I'm asking too much, but I can't escape the notion that many writers in this field want other people to feel their teeth, but certainly wouldn't be caught dead sinking them into their own skin, to discover the color of their own blood. To do that would be too unconventional ... too dangerous ... too painful ...

And probably too uncommercial.

That said, *Volume V* of this series contains, in addition to those several stories I liked and those I did not, the usual virtues associated with this series. The collection boasts a handful of poems I don't feel qualified to comment on, and Darlow and Windling and Ed Bryant have

provided exhaustive surveys about the 1991 goings-on in horror, fantasy, and the media, respectively. There's also a lengthy list of honorable mentions of stories that didn't make the final cut. In short, more than you ever wanted to know about happenings in the field in 1991 is included here. As a bookseller, I've always found this series, and the companion *Dogz* volumes devoted to science fiction, perfect to recommend to customers who've felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of reading material being published in the fantastic literatures these days. It may seem contradictory, but despite, perhaps because of everything I've said in this review, *Volume V* will be no exception. 

Arthur Byron Cover lives in Northridge, California, and is one of the proprietors of *Dangerous Visions* bookstore.

Through the Heart by Richard Grant
New York, NY: Bantam, 1991; \$5.99 pb; 376 pages
reviewed by Gregory Feeley

Richard Grant's fourth novel arrives in the wake of harbingers. An early one appeared in last year's *Nebula Award Stories 25*, where editor Michael Bishop, introducing an essay by Grant, refers to his forthcoming novel as "a straightforward tale with a single narrative consciousness and an uncluttered plot line." An earlier one can be found in the paperback edition of *Views from the Oldest House*, which offers an excerpt from the forthcoming novel, prefaced with a teaser ("A monstrous vehicle called the *Oasis* moves inexorably across the wasteland ...") that makes it sound rather like *Rumors of Spring*.

And *Views from the Oldest House* makes an oblique if hard-to-miss reference to Grant's next, then-unwritten novel when the narrator looks "beyond this house and beyond this view to another one, the next one, where the road runs like a blunt weapon, through the heart." (And the final word of *Through the Heart* is "reverses," which the "About the Author" note on the following page tells us is the title of Grant's next novel. A structural tactic, each novel cupping the spark of its predecessor, is glimpsed.) The *Oasis* indeed runs like a blunt weapon, although over no road save that created by the wake of its own passage.

So *Through the Heart* is heralded as something different, yet similar. Bantam Spectra sends out some ominous signals of its own in making *Through the Heart* a mass-market paperback, although Grant's previous two novels had both enjoyed hardcover editions from Bantam. And on publication month, the Bantam trade ad features a few carefully chosen words by the author on his book, which he acknowledges "reflects the concern for Nature (capitalized) of *Rumors of Spring*" and "inherits (at least) the fear of a too-organized world from *Views from the Oldest House*."

And every portent proves, in its way, true. We discover on the first page that *Through the Heart* possesses a clean narrative line that will cheer readers who were put off by the earlier novels' baroque effluence. "When their wagon broke down at the *Oasis*, Kem was traded by his family for a scavenged motor and a set of high-grade tools. The rest of the wagons blew eastward on the autumn winds." With these pellucid sentences, the reader follows Kem onto the *Oasis*, an enormous vehicle that rolls across the wasteland like a leviathan. Assigned to the ship's galley, Kem is introduced to a world of bulkheads and passageways, where the *Oasis*'s strange crew and stranger "Residents" live as the ship carries on its unimaginable mission.

Grant's serene tale of the *Oasis*'s journey across a wasted America devastated by plague constitutes a very peculiar kind of sentimental education, in which Kem grows slowly into an understanding of what has overtaken his world and the role the *Oasis* plays in it. The plague, a wasting disease called the crying, is mysterious in cause and propagation, and although the *Oasis*'s paying Residents all suffer from the disease (whose ravages can be forestalled by some therapy the *Oasis* controls), no crew member seems to get it.

Although Kem, curious though he is, fails to make sense of the fragmentary evidence he observes, the genre-wise reader has no trouble interpreting the clues. A Resident who wonders at the cause of the crying has Kem read to him from old books, one of which contains a folktale about a plague that can only be cured through the sacrifice of


young children. Rising in the world of the *Oasis*, Kem (who has come to the attention of the urbane and imperturbable Captain Hand, who intimates that Kem shows some unappreciated affinity with the ship's elect) is asked to infuse a settlement and spirit away two young adolescents, a boy and a girl, whom he never sees again. When the Resident, who believes he has learned something about the relationship between the *Oasis* and the crying, decides to return home, he is killed.

Like Grant's other novels, *Through the Heart* shows an abiding concern with the nature of Story, with the characters' fitful awareness of themselves as being part of a narrative, which inevitably shares affinities with the patterns of older stories. That the *Oasis* is a metaphor for the devastation wreaked upon Sodom, the ripened Earth, as well as a literal plague-carrier is sufficiently plain that various characters seem close to remarking upon it; and the explanation for the spreading and treatment of the crying, when it comes, appears to resemble ritual in part because of its allegorical significance to the novel.

All of which can leave the reader deeply bemused. The final revelations may be a surprise to Kem, but did Grant expect us to gape as well? The monstrous truth—that the *Oasis* in fact spreads the plague—serves as the climax of a fairly long novel, which proves a heavier burden than it can shoulder. After the long, brooding, and beautifully composed descriptions of Kem aboard the *Oasis*, his slow and uncertain penetration of the ship's mysteries (with the genre-wise reader always ahead of him, where we assume the author knows us to be), and the various other narrative complications converging to a single crisis, this discovery carries no real charge.

What charge Grant offers lies rather in the explanation behind it. Captain Hand proves to be a Penitent, one of a withdrawn sect that Kem has earlier encountered, whose members "assume responsibility" for the world's ruin. In dispensing the crying, the Captain preserves a balance that alone prevents humanity, locust-like, from overwhelming the world once more. The Penitent is a Scourge.

It is a discovery that works perhaps better on the novel's figurative level—as part of a Story, whose essentials can be encompassed in a folk tale—than as the explanation for the ecological denaturation of a continent, a catastrophe whose particulars the novel so vividly dramatized. In any event, the revelation essentially concludes the novel. Violence erupts, Kem and some others escape, and the novel ends less than a page later. There is a final twist in the last paragraph—the "ravens"—but its significance, on whatever level, escapes me.

The best passages in *Through the Heart* resonate deeply, and this sympathetic reader has returned to them with pleasure, each time hoping they would carry him on into a happier reading of the novel's plot of an ending. No Grant novel has yet ended as bravely as it began, although this one held its crest up longer than its predecessors did. One awaits *Rumors* with raptured but game expectations, hopeful that Grant can trace his Pattern in the carpet without then pulling it out from under his reader. 

Gregory Feeley recently completed a new novel, *Exit Without Saving*. He lives in Hamden, Connecticut.

in the following pages is material used to introduce the Zelazny, Varley, Gibson unit.

For many years, I've listened to people—but especially people in the science fiction world of readers and writers—declare that they are not so much interested in “writing” as in “story”—a notion closely connected with that of “craft” and somehow, at least in the minds of the readers who declare it, one that sits in uneasy relation to “art.” Stuck with the truism that there's no way to acquire a story off a written page without the medium of language—language, more over, somebody else has written—finally I find myself having to say that to be concerned with story and not with writing is willfully to ignore what is doing the actual work. And to pursue craft without art is to pursue only those areas of art that produce no problems, contradictions, or tensions between the material and its execution. It is to pursue only that part of art where no risk is perceived, either in terms of politics or aesthetics.

There are readers and writers who are, nevertheless, comfortable reading—and writing—wholly within this discourse of story and craft. But my own analysis marks me as clearly and committedly uncomfortable with it; and definitely outside their number. Some of you will have already figured out that I am saying in effect that, in terms of a writerly ontology, I don't even believe “story” exists—except as a convenient way to talk about an effect of writing; whereas readers and writers who are comfortable in that discourse are content with a concept of “writing” that makes it one with a notion of “style,” which they see as a variable aspect, like color, of a solid, visible, and locatable entity called a story. Whereas for me, words are the solid and locatable elements in a text, and meaning, story, style, and tone are all shifting and flickering aspects to various combinations of words that are, all of them, equally evanescent and intangible, intricately interrelated and inextricable—analyzable yes, but never simple or exhaustible.

Ever since the early days of science fiction in the pulp magazines of the thirties, there have been writers who have achieved a certain order of intense popularity—one that, to my mind, simply cannot be explained with anything like elegance using only the discourse of story and craft. Often the rhetoric that grows up around them suggests the craft/story ontology. But I want to talk about some of these writers in terms that make sense to me. To do so, I will eventually have to talk in some detail about that term that is even more troubling in a popular discourse where “craft” and “art” are allowed to wrangle and “story” and “writing” to dialogize; and this is the aforementioned notion of “quality.”

The term is common to the rhetoric of both discourses—but within each it means a very different thing. In the discourse of craft and story, it refers to an important, presumably visible, and locatable aspect that is one with what is good—by consensus—in a good story. But in the discourse of “art” and “writing,” quality is not a consensus entity at all; once again, it is a social construct that comes into being through the conflict among educated minds.

What Roger Zelazny, John Varley, and William Gibson share as writers is the extraordinary degree to which each, respectively in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, excited the science fiction community of readers, writers, and committed fans.

To speak of “the science fiction community” is to speak of a reading and writing community that, while it numbers in the thousands, is still small enough so that sales or mass popularity is not the only factor broadly meaningful to a writer's reputation. In that community, quality of writing is still—sometimes—capable of generating more excitement than simple ubiquity of copies spread about, which is finally what sales alone mean.

Prefatory essays introduce their stories in the first short story collection by each: Zelazny's *Four For Tomorrow* [1967], introduced by Theodore Sturgeon; Varley's *The Persistence of Vision* (1978), introduced by Algis Budrys; and Gibson's *Burning Chrome* (1986), introduced by Bruce Sterling. In a writing field where such introductions are not at all the rule for first story collections, all three introductions, then, are signs of the greater than usual excitement already in place around

each of these writers by the time that first story collection was published.

At the 1966 World Science Fiction Convention in Cleveland, during the opening ceremonies when the names of the various sf writers present were announced, while older and more popular professionals such as Isaac Asimov, Fredrik Pohl, and Poul Anderson drew a perfectly respectable amount of applause, when Roger Zelazny's name was read out, it was greeted with a standing ovation in a hall filled with almost a thousand attendees—an ovation which went on and on and on! During that same World SF Convention weekend, Zelazny's first novel, *This Immortal*, tied with Frank Herbert's *Dune* for the Hugo Award as best sf novel of the year. When we consider Herbert had been writing and known to the sf world since the early fifties, and that his giant novel had already appeared in serial form as individual novels, each of which had already been serialized in *Analog* magazine over two three-month periods, and that already, in hardcover, it was beginning to cross over into the awareness of the greater reading public (where it would go on to sell some twelve million copies in paperback and spawn a series of sequels), it's even more astonishing that Zelazny, whose stories had appeared only in the previous three years and whose first novel had come out only in a cut version squeezed into two issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, managed to make any showing at all against Herbert in the voting, much less produce a tie.

But all these were signs of the extraordinary excitement that the verbal electricity and the sheer glitter of Zelazny's prose had generated in the three years since he'd been publishing science fiction.

While he always seemed to enjoy the attention lavished upon him in these years, Zelazny, a slim, dark man of Polish-American extraction, was nevertheless quite humble before that attention. Certainly he never did anything that made him appear to seek it out—outside of producing extraordinarily fine sf stories. The same humorous irony with which he confronted the most intense excitement about his work—from 1963 through approximately 1968—he would use to confront those people who, a few years later, were to declare his newer work not as strong as his earlier production, even as his general popularity grew on the purely statistical level with his various Amber books. Zelazny went on to write more award-winning novels and stories, including *Lord of Light* and “Home is the Hangman.” His Amber novels, which began appearing in sixties-nine, were unremarkably popular, as the individual volumes came out, over the next twenty years. But the excitement around Zelazny within the science fiction community still centers on the ten long stories (“A Rose for Ecclesiastes” [1963], “He Who Shapes” [1964], “The Graveyard Heart” [1964], “The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth” [1965], “The Burial” [1965], “The Keys to December” [1966], “For a Breath I Tarry” [1966], “This Moment of the Storm” [1966], “This Mortal Mountain” [1967], and—the one where the energy falls and, somehow, never recovers—“Damnation Alley” [1967]), coupled with a handful of those early novels, *This Immortal*, *The Dream Master* (an expansion of “He Who Shapes”), *Bridge of Ashes*, *Today We Choose Faces*, and *Doorsways in the Sand*—this last coming to be considered by many his best novel, with *This Immortal* close behind. (Others would argue just as intelligently and just as passionately for *Isle of the Dead* and *Lord of Light*, producing precisely the conflict necessary for the production of the idea of quality this essay puts forth.)

By the mid-seventies Zelazny was deep into his Amber series—commercially successful but aesthetically lightweight. He had publicly stated that he could not afford to write the kind of books and stories he once had. Though his high reputation rested on them, they took too much time for the money they brought in, he claimed. And he was now, by his own admission (reprinted in both fannzines and prozines), too fond of the good life. Sales were up. And there was certainly no fall-off in the amount of fannish adulation he received. But that adulation simply no longer carried the intensity and edge that it once had, when his work had been perceived as exhibiting unequalled writerly mastery—rather than the much less complex ability to please a statistically growing audience. Now, in the science fiction field, the first stories of John Varley began to attract attention. By his first story collection, *The Persistence of Vision*, in 1978, the excitement that had been gathered around this tall, quiet West Coast writer, if it was not at the same pitch Zelazny had once commanded, it was in the same ballpark. John Herbert Varley—called Herb by his friends—was a gangling young man, still in his middle

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twenties when his first story, about life on the hugely hot surface of the planet Mercury, "Retrograde Summer," appeared in 1974. Working as a welfare assistant for disabled people in Oregon, Varley had been assigned to assist a young, wheelchair-bound woman. They'd fallen in love; had married; together, they had three children. And Varley had begun to write.

By the time his first collection of stories had come out in conjunction with his first novel, *The Ophiuchi Hotline*, three things were obvious about Varley. Clearly, he had gone to school at the feet of Russ and the other women of writers of this period, such as Vonda McIntyre, Ursula Le Guin, and James Tiptree, Jr. Varley's feminist sympathies were as evident as Russ's, if less analytically honed. As well, he obviously enjoyed the possibilities of technology. Also, he was deeply concerned in all ways with the problem of prosthetics—and, by extension, the dignity and rights of the handicapped. This concern climaxed in his Nebula and Hugo Award-winning novella that gave his first story collection its title, "The Persistence of Vision," a disturbing story—in many ways and on many levels—about a sighted man who discovers a communal society of the blind which has set up its home away from the rest of the sighted world, somewhere in the southwest. Most of Varley's stories ("The Persistence of Vision" itself a notable exception) take place in a more or less coherent universe (the Eight Worlds), in which the discovery of a broadcast band of information originating from the area of the constellation Ophiuchus has allowed humankind to make a quantum technological leap in the next century.

While Zelazny's stories had been the first of his texts to excite sf readers, his early novels had carried that excitement to an even higher pitch. Varley's first novel, *The Ophiuchi Hotline* (1978), was satisfactory enough. But while it fleshed out and added important information to the Eight Worlds series, as a book in itself it did not have the same formal perfection as such stories as "The Phantom of Kansas" or "Overdrawn at the Memory Bank." But now Varley launched into a massive trilogy, the first novel of which was *Titan* (1979). As perceived within a discourse of story and craft, especially as the first volume of a projected trilogy (which, in such a discourse, can always bank on the notion of some later events, or revelation that will make the story move into some particularly satisfying direction), the book was also satisfactory—even popular. And when Isaac Asimov introduced Varley at Philcon in '78 (as "The New Heinlein"), the applause went on and on in a way the sf community had not heard since Zelazny's introduction at the '66 Tricon. And when Herb unrolled his map of Titan, the applause became a standing ovation. But for those people who read *Titan* within the discourse of writing and art, two hundred and fifty pages of writing was still two hundred and fifty pages of writing; and, having nothing to do

with where the story was going to go, the micropleasures of those two hundred fifty pages should have long ago begun to cohere into the greater vividness and intensity that marked the shorter works. But what those readers had generally found, however, was a rather lumbering and somehow lifeless job, though all of Varley's concerns, from his feminist sympathies to his scientific interests in prostheses, were further explored in the book.

The excitement around Varley's short stories was, however, still growing. A second collection of earlier stories managed to bear up under the appalling title *The Barbie Murders*; it was, yes, the title of one of the stories contained; that still did not excuse it. Several years later, *The Barbie Murders* was reissued under the title *Picnic on Neartide*—another story from the book; but not much of an improvement! Still, Varley's stories were the most exciting if being written in those years, with new tales such as "Press Enter" clearly ranking among the best he'd ever done. That excitement continued through still a third collection, *Blue Champagne* (1988).

Sometime before this, as fallout from the first surge of excitement, an early Varley story, "Air Raid," was bought for the movies. Varley was retained to do the film script. He expanded his film treatment into a novel, *Millennium* (1983; also the title of the film); what strengths *Millennium* (the novel) had were formal. Like Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, it alternated chapter by chapter between two points of view: that of a time-traveling woman from a polluted and decadent future whose job is to go back in time and rescue people from air crashes about to occur, and a contemporary airlines crash inspector who begins to realize that something is profoundly wrong in one of the accidents he's been assigned to cover. Though the novel's ending (first) violated its own formal pattern and (second) fell very flat, it seemed that careful scripting might save it. But the movie that resulted, *Millennium*, with Cheryl Ladd and Kris Kristofferson, abandoned any pretense at structure; also, it pulled in several unrelated special effects sequences with no concern for the action; generally *Millennium* (the movie) managed to come in as one of the worst sf films of the decade. (The weakest of Zelazny's early decalogues of tales, "Damnation Alley," had also been turned into an eminently forgettable film [starring Jan Michael Vincent] of the same name.) Again, the excitement around these writers was initially based on the high skill and craft of their actual writing—not the number of sales, the size of their advances, or the success of the movies made from their works. Nevertheless, that excitement has often been injured by a bad commercial choice; and all three of the writers in this unit have made choices perceived by the general community as commercial and poor.

By the first years of the eighties, Varley had divorced his wife;

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neither *Wizard* nor *Demon*, the second and third novels in his trilogy, had done anything to ameliorate the sheer lumbering quality of the tripartite work. While "The Persistence of Vision" was Varley's most honored and awarded story, it was not a characteristic tale. And certain writers, such as Thomas Disch, even found it repugnant:

The year the story took its awards, the country was shocked at the dark horrors of the Jonestown massacre in Guyana, where some three hundred followers of the white Reverend Jim Jones, mostly black American women and children, were brainwashed into committing mass suicide by drinking cyanide-laced soft drinks. Disch's pointed comment about the tale of its self-blinding hero was: "The story made me feel that at any moment someone was going to come up and offer me a glass of Kool-Aid." And, by the middle of the decade, Varley's short stories had all but ceased.

William Gibson began publishing professionally in 1981, with a story—"Johnny Mnemonic"—that a number of readers have since claimed is his best. In Gibson, two of Varley's concerns seem to return, even if in a muted, minor key: forceful female characters (though often in secondary positions)—and prostheses. Molly Milion, the lead action character in "Johnny Mnemonic" and a major figure in Gibson's first novel, *Neuromancer*, seems like a direct rewrite of Russ's Jael from *The Female Man*: both women are of near superhuman efficiency, both wear black jumpsuits, both have retractable blades hidden in their fingertips, both enjoy their sex, and both—though for different reasons—have unsettling stares.

The correspondence seems so complete, I once asked Gibson if he was aware of the similarity. Though he said he admired Russ as a writer, he claimed to have been unaware of the parallel until I asked about it—a sign, I suspect, of just how successful Russ (along with a number of other women writers of the seventies) had actually been in shifting the conventions of the genre toward an image of female competence. Both seem to have become shared genre conventions rather than specific aspects of specific writers' work.

By the mid-eighties both concerns had sedimented enough in written sf to affect prominently the second *Alien* film—arguably superior to the first because of those conventions.

The Ace Specials publishing line had been quiescent for almost fifteen years, but in eighty-two, Ace Books revived the series, again under Terry Carr's editorship. Until his death from heart failure in 1986, Carr was able to publish more than a half a dozen volumes. Among the earliest of the new series was Gibson's first novel, *Neuromancer*—which went on to win both the Nebula Award and Hugo Award for best novel of 1984.

In 1982, a writer named Bruce Bethke published a short story called "Cyberpunk" in George Scithers's *Amazing Stories* magazine. A few months later, in 1983, Gardner Dozois, the editor of *Imaginarium's Science Fiction Magazine*, first used in print Bethke's title to designate Gibson and a number of other writers, including Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Rudy Rucker, Tom Maddox, Pat Cadigan (the only woman writer in the group), and Lewis Shiner: the cyberpunks had been named. (Though Bethke's story had lent them a name and Bethke had occasionally met them socially, paradoxically he was never considered part of the group.) Dozois doubtlessly found the term "cyberpunk" appropriate for these writers because of their hard-boiled and cynical attitude, along with their interest in computers. They were in their middle to late thirties, so that the suggestion of youth was ironic, rather than reflective: by the early eighties, the Punk Rock and New Wave Music phenomenon was generally thought to be fast aging, if not over with.

Another thing some of these writers had in common was they occasionally published in Sterling's Texas-based fanzine, *Cheap Truth*, where Sterling himself did a regular, raunchy, even frenetic column under the open pen-name Vincent Omniaveritas—a Latin pun suggesting something like "Truth conquers all." An interesting sf writer in his own right, Sterling had already made some attempts to start a movement among some of these same writers—which he'd first designated simply as "the movement," and later as "the microshades group." As in all such groups, named from the outside, all the writers involved were soon protesting publicly that they had nothing—at least eschentially—to do with one another, while other readers in other fanzines began to

argue whether other writers, e.g. Greg Bear or Marc Laidlaw, really ought to be added to the group.

Cheap Truth, with its fanzine energy, had occasionally attacked a number of other new sf writers, including Kim Stanley Robinson, John Kessel, and Connie Willis—all of whom were talented, existing in their own ways, and generally moving toward popularity. Now another sf writer, Michael Swanwick, in an article that appeared in *Imaginarium's SF Magazine*, located another group of sf writers he designated the humanists—a group composed largely of those particularly popular writers whom *Cheap Truth* attacked. To add to the paradoxes, Willis's first collection of sf short stories, *First Watch*, contained an early story, "All My Darling Daughters," which, had she not written it in 1979, might easily have been taken as a particularly effective parody, or even pastiche, of an eighties cyberpunk story.

Within the sf community, the general level of debate between the humanists and the cyberpunks—all of whom were busily protesting on both sides that no such groups existed—was generally lively and caused a lot of people to write a lot of pages in a lot of fanzines. To the extent that it caused a number of readers to think a bit more clearly about what was going on within the genre, it was undoubtedly a healthy phenomenon. Outside the sf community, however, people tended to see cyberpunk as some sort of oppositional movement—which ignored the fact that what is generally considered the most characteristic cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*, swept up both the Hugo and Nebula Awards in its year, which suggests rather an almost blanket acceptance by both readers (who vote for the Hugo) and writers (who vote for the Nebula). Much of the rhetoric was also silly and self-serving—such as Sterling's claim in his introduction to Gibson's *Burning Chrome* that nothing of interest happened in sf during the seventies—as though there had been no Russ, no Le Guin, nor any Varley. (He was almost immediately taken to task for this by Jeanne Gomoll, in "An Open Letter to Joanna Russ," in her fine and intelligent fanzine *New Moon*.) Sometime in the middle of all this, *Rolling Stone Magazine* ran an article on cyberpunk, centering largely on Gibson—and ignoring any of the writers on the other side(s) of the by-now multi-sided debate.

The result was that Gibson was soon hired to write screenplays for Hollywood—first for his own novel, *Neuromancer*, then for the third film in the Sigourney Weaver *Alien* series. Though Gibson completed both scripts, the third *Alien* film does not use Gibson's, and the *Neuromancer* film has, so far, come to nothing—though I spent an interesting afternoon in Lawrence, Kansas, at the home of William Burroughs, in 1986, brainstorming with him when—briefly—he'd been retained to write a script for the movie.

Gibson's second and third novels, *Count Zero* and *Mono Lisa Overdrive* (like Varley's, continuations of a trilogy) were not able to generate quite the same excitement as his first.

The most unkind characterization of the cyberpunk group that one now began to hear was an anonymous one that, nevertheless, carried a certain weight: "The cyberpunk movement consists of one writer (Gibson), one critic (Sterling), and a lot of hangers-on." Though this slighters considerable interesting work, both fiction and nonfiction, by John Shirley, Rudy Rucker, Tom Maddox, Pat Cadigan, and Marc Laidlaw, it nevertheless carries a disturbing weight.

In 1986, Sterling publicly proclaimed the "death" of Vincent Omniaveritas, and ceased to put out *Cheap Truth*. In the same year, he edited a cyberpunk anthology, *Mirrorshades*, that appeared from Arbor House in 1987. With the publication of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, within the sf community the cyberpunk movement was now sufficiently memorialized and monumentalized to be over with.

Around this time, the first issues of a new and impressive fanzine, edited by Steven P. Brown and Daniel Steffan out of Washington, D.C., *Science Fiction Eye*, seemed as if it might put some energy into prolonging the movement. The *Eye*, as it came to be called, ran interviews with Gibson and a number of other cyberpunk writers; as well, it regularly gave considerable page space to both Shirley and Sterling, cyberpunk's two most articulate critics. Looking back on these issues, however, the *Eye* seemed more interested in preserving the recently completed history of cyberpunk—rather than propelling with active intervention.

In order to cash in on the excitement and the term, New American Library publishers contracted Bethke to expand his original story "Cyberpunk" to novel length. When the book was completed, however,

they rejected it. (It was, apparently, not enough like the cyberpunk work of Gibson or the work of other writers in *Mirrorshades*.) Eventually, in 1988, it was published by Baen Books. Receiving generally poor reviews, it quickly vanished. Its only effect seems to be that it encouraged certain paperback publishers to start putting clothing and haircuts on some of the characters pictured on their covers reminiscent of punkish styles from the mid-seventies. But since such punk packaging (which continues, by the bye) has never been associated with Gibson, Sterling, Shirley, or, indeed, any of the *Mirrorshades* writers, it finally did more to dispense the cyberpunk phenomenon than to solidify it.

Because of the inflationary excitement generated by the very non-academic *Rolling Stone* piece—neither an informed nor an insightful article—and facilitated by the documentary evidence preserved in the late '80s issues of *SP Eye*, a number of academics became interested in cyberpunk by 1987/88 and continue even today to speak of it as if it were a living current in contemporary sf production. They are still

producing a series of more or less interesting special review issues and casebooks, in which they often try to link cyberpunk with other currents in postmodern life.

Because the cyberpunk phenomenon was always perceived within the cf community as an argument between groups and schools of sf writers—cyberpunks, humanists, feminists (however ill-defined and overlapping these groups might have been)—it doubtless produced more pages of fanzine writing (as well as more articles in professionally published sf magazines) between '83 and '88 than any like phenomenon in science fiction since the New Wave of the 1960s. But it's also arguable that the intensity of excitement produced by the quality of Gibson's work—the writer whose texts were almost always at the center of the debates—while considerable, was not as great as that produced by Varley's work in the seventies or Zelazny's in the sixties. ▶

This article will conclude in our next issue.

Brilliant—But Not Serious *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson

New York: Bantam Books, 1992; \$22.00 hc, \$10.00 tpb; 440 pages
reviewed by Howard V. Hendrix

Thomas Pynchon, in the foreword to his short story collection *Slow Learner*, remarks rather enigmatically that what most characterizes "serious" literature is its attitude toward death. I was reminded of this statement when Professor Frank McConnell emphasized it in his presentation "You Bet Your Life: Death and the Storyteller" at the 1992 Eaton Conference.

The Pynchon quotation was particularly telling for me at the time, since I was about two thirds of the way through Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, an encyclopedic postmodern novel very much in the Pynchon mode. Advance hype had described the book as *Newman* meets *Vineland* and as a stylistic *tour de force*. I'm a sucker for encyclopedic novels, especially cybernityish ones, so I was all prepared to love the book.

Snow Crash is indeed Pynchonesque. The book's punning and playful use of language ranges from a hero and protagonist named Hiro Protagonist, to near future communities called "franchulantes" and "burclaves" as contractions of "franchise consulates" and "suburban enclaves," to some very fine parody of the latter twentieth century's fetish for acronyms. The juxtaposition of self-referential, self-aware, high-lit sensibility and pop culture zap!-und-pow! is hilariously evident when, following one particularly Ninja-movieish fight scene, we are told "After that—after Hiro gets onto his motorcycle, and the New South Africans get into their all-terrain pickups, and The Enforcers get into their slick black Enforcer mobiles, and they all go screaming out onto the highway—after that it's just a chase scene" (285).

Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* are likewise two texts simultaneously and paradoxically both encyclopedic and regional. Though both range globally over the map of human knowledge and individual experience, the overwhelming majority of the plotted action in each text takes place in or near California. In both texts, the state of California comes to serve as a metaphor for the State of the World.

In the mysticorealist *Vineland*—with its karmic avengers and UFO/Jettifier trips above the Pacific—we find examples of "science fiction in the encyclopedic novel," and in the near-future *Snow Crash* we have an example of "the encyclopedic novel in science fiction." Yet, despite the Bodhi Dharma Pizza surrealism of Pynchon's text and the Cosa Nostra Pizza Deliverator's hardtech future in Stephenson's, both novels (besides viewing pizza as a sort of doughy metaphor for American culture) exhibit what Fredric Jameson in his *Postmodernism* has called a "collapse into mere realism and the representation of the present." In attempting to defamiliarize the familiar (in this case, the reality and present of California), Pynchon and Stephenson inevitably end up also trying to familiarize the unfamiliar—including The Great Unfamiliar, Death.

It is in the handling of death that Pynchon and Stephenson most clearly part company. Stephenson, with his emphasis on violence as

merely part of his style, most clearly joins the ranks of the so-called cyberpunks. Pynchon, by way of contrast, handles even the odd serio-comic death of *Vineland*'s archvillain Brock Vond gently and thoughtfully.

I think it's appropriate to remark at this point that, as a Quaker dedicated to nonviolence, I am not an unbiased reviewer—particularly when it comes to questions concerning the representation of violence. Book reviews, in truth, are never really about books themselves but rather about a particular reader's response to them. Even in a single reader, that response can change over time—can, in fact, change over the course of a single reading. Such was my experience while reading *Snow Crash*. For about the first two thirds of the book I was so enamored with it that it was quite literally keeping me up nights. It was pure kick, dazzling in its encyclopedic range (from ancient Sumeria to near-future Los Angeles), managing somehow to balance a headlong pace with an expository load that makes *Moby Dick* look "plotty." Any writer who can describe the sound of shopping carts being jammed together outside a market as a "clashy anal copulation" has something going for him, and the fact that Stephenson peppers almost every page with such shrewd and beautifully realized metaphors makes *Snow Crash* a joy to read. That the novel sets its story within a grand historic sweep—the expanse of writing, literacy, and history itself—only made me enjoy the book all the more.

And yet . . . And yet I had some problems with the book, predominantly in that last third. No, the problems did not have to do with Y. T.'s super skate board or the almost superhuman talents of Hiro and his foe Raven—aspects of the book which have been called "cartoonish" in some reviews. If superhuman abilities and magical "power tools" are "cartoonish," then *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is cartoonish, Arthur and his sword Excalibur are cartoonish. Half of *Snow Crash*'s kick is its purposeful, self-aware, self-reflexive juxtaposition of elements formerly characterized as "high lit" on one hand and "pop junk" on the other. In its use of deliberate exaggeration—the deliberateness of which is (or should be) clear to both the writer and the reader—*Snow Crash* joins a tradition that ranges from Aristotle's *Orlando Furioso* to William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*. So it's not the power tools problem.

No, it's not the ending *per se*. One of the subtler themes of the book is the survival of writing as part of the human tool kit, and the inherent linkage of writing and history. "Prehistoric" simply means "before writing"—history is a byproduct of the technology we call writing. Current talk about the "end of history" interestingly coincides with declining literacy—that is, "posthistoric" means "after writing." The temporal endpoints Stephenson chooses for his book are the dawn of writing as a technology in ancient Sumer and the apparent dusk of writing in our own increasingly postliterate world—a time when writing as a technology is in some ways becoming obsolete. As a writer,

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I'm glad to see the world ofrecession and writings survive, even if (in *Snow Crash*) by means of a happy ending that doesn't fully follow naturally from the story.

No, it's not even the book's violence and body count in themselves. Writers of tragedies from *Aeschylus* to Arthur Miller have killed loads of folks. In English, Marlowe and Shakespeare are particularly notable for their body counts and interesting ways of "offing" people. It's not the violence and death, it's the *attitude* toward violence and death that distinguishes "serious" from "frivolous" literature. In Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, as in Walter Jon Williams's *Hardwired* or William Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy, life is cheap—or rather, life is rendered cheap by the fact that the antagonist characters become no-account counters, mere obstacles to be blown away, like video game "enemies." Stephenson's book "kills more and cares less" than, say, *Hamlet*. *Snow Crash* expresses a cavalier attitude toward death in that characters simply disappear from the story like defeated opponents from the videogame screen, or like any number of opponents who disappear from the movie screen in dozens of action adventure movies of the *Lethal Weapon* or *Die Hard* variety. Death in these texts carries no weight, and this makes such texts, for all their surface realism,

decidedly unrealistic and *unlife-like*.

Death, in point of fact, has consequences—at individual, family, communal, and societal levels. In the traditional view, literature, to be considered "serious," cannot afford to take Death any more lightly than it takes Life. "Counting the cost" becomes not merely an extrinsic moral issue but an aspect of intrinsic aesthetic quality, including that aesthetic quality usually called "internal consistency."

Whether "internal consistency" and "seriousness" are still valid categories in our consideration of postmodern texts, or whether such categories are merely an obsolete hangover from modernist aesthetics and are now essentially obsolete—these questions remain open to debate. Suffice it to say that some postmodernist texts (like Pynchon's *Vineland*) preserve the emphasis on seriousness and a serious attitude toward death, while others (like Stephenson's *Snow Crash*) do not. In any case a text can be "brilliant" (in the sense of inventive, encyclopedic, carefully imagined and well-realized) without being "serious." *Snow Crash* amply demonstrates this, and makes for wildly entertaining reading in the process. ▀

Howard V. Hendrix lives in Fresno, California.

The Boys Want to Be with the Boys *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson

New York: Bantam, 1992; \$22.00 hc, \$10.00 pb; 440 pages

reviewed by Gwyneth Jones

It must have been about the time of the first moon landings when Brian Aldiss announced that the real world had caught up with science fiction: *we are now living in the future*. When the news reached me, a little later, I was unconvinced. *Here*—where's the galactic empire then? Where's the Moonbase? Why haven't "we" colonized Mars? Why am I still eating toast for breakfast, instead of protein-pills? Where's the warp drive, for heaven's sake? At last, there can be no doubt: The apothecosis is achieved. Cyberspace is no longer science fiction, no longer a rough description of one or two good books and a mixed bag of followers; nor even merely flavor of the month for a future groupie elite of *Mondo 2000* readers, goggled in to three-dimensional MTV. It is advertising, junkfood and channel-hopping. It is part of the world outside of. You may laugh (I certainly do); but this is no mean achievement. We pretend we're writing about the far flung future. In the world outside, sf is strongly perceived as an artifact of the nineteen fifties: to be considered *postmodern* is a great leap forward.

Cyberspace was never science fiction. It is, or was, sheer fantasy: now bootstrapped into the real world by the will (maybe I should say *sinkerbells*) of a few thousand virtual-reality nuts. By sheer longing, these characters dissolve the clunky actuality of their goggles and gloves into the limitless, god-polluted, metaphysical otherworld of William Gibson's metaphor. And who knows, maybe (as in one of those homespun Heinlein tales about the power of positive thinking) they'll get there. Meanwhile, "real" cyberspace still belongs to the folks who can think in hexadecimal. Now, apparently, cyberpunk (the fiction) does too. Scientists have always written science fiction, but usually they steer clear of gaudy fantasy. Cyberpunk is different, and a grasp of Boolean algebra doesn't necessarily mean you're an austere academic (nor even ordinarily literate). The hacker strikes back.

In classic style, Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* is set in a futurized-present or presentified-future of absolutely no determinate date, sort of 2021 going on 1975. The Information Technology industry has recently coalesced from brilliant hippiedom into Bill Gates; the children of World War Two vets are in their mid-twenties; and there's been time for the USA to collapse and reform as a myriad tiny "Franchise or Quasi-National entities," each with its own borders, rabid paranoia, savage security forces. In the description of this state of affairs the true demographic situation along the USA section of the Pacific Rim gets a rare public outing. But Gibson was perhaps lucky that his version of World War III had become irrelevant before the book was published. Straightaway, in *Snow Crash*, there's a sense that present-day prejudice is not being challenged but rather being *twi-*

sized in this "weird futuristic nightmare." And the strutting, frenetically overloaded demotic (stuffed with brandnames) that William Gibson practically invented off the street, is not as successful as it used to be in glamorizing the cozziness of a siege mentality.

Though *Snow Crash* doesn't have the magic sheen of *Neuromancer*, the imitation is sincere enough to deserve the commendably restrained and civilized puff from Wm. Gibson on the back of the book. (NB: Possibly Mr. Stephenson had never heard of Wm. Gibson: maybe it's done by cultural osmosis and the influence of actual *sf* books is my *objet revolve*... but I'd lay money on it.) The Decline and Fall Scenario has wit. In the shattered and lawless ex-USA the old bogeys of Organized Crime are on the rise like Visigoths, smaring the best high school graduates into their career structure. And yes, the Mafia were the ultimate evil, and yes, they are still murderous savages; but also they are the future of civilization... (In a thousand years or so they'll be building gothic cathedrals). It works.

Place in this background a smart nerd of a hacker/hero, who aspires to and is terrified by the feminine values of civilization. Hiro Protagonist was a brilliant hacker in the old free days. (The term "hacker," note, in this world, has no shady implications. Since there are no laws, it can't be illegal to mess around in other peoples' digital environment; it can only be more or less dangerous.) Now he spends his time hopping between goggled-in life in the tasteless, touchless gloss-magazine world of the "metaverse"; and his broke and unemployed reality. He yearns after the sophisticated other, brilliant hacker Juanita; yet knows deep in his heart that she despises the way he chews without closing his mouth. One day, the plot starts happening. Hiro learns, or thinks he learns, that his inamorata is off to save the world (which still means the sort of geographical area of the ex-US) from an ancient, ghastly conspiracy. He takes arms, in the hopes of getting laid.

Snow Crash is a book peppered with sideswipes—at uppity Nips, people who try to make you wear motorcycle helmets; at bureaucracy in government offices, where wild free hacker spirits are forced to peruse idiot memos about Toilet Tissue. Revenge fantasies of this kind are the privilege and embarrassment of those novelists who scorn to acquire complete control over their personal-experience sphincters. In this case the *dis-ave* that could be generally headed "resentment of control, resentment of competition" is definitely germane to the plot. The trouble is, the writer doesn't allow Hiro Protagonist a lot to be resentful about. In the metaverse our hero is a warrior prince... rich, brilliant hacker, ace Japanese swordsman, romantic Black/Asian mix, tall, phenomenal biker, fabu musculature... In the ungoggled fictional world he

remains all of the above, except rich. Even then, he's materially much better off than almost anyone else he meets. And he always somehow has the wherewithal to reproduce in life the fantasy excesses of the goggled world. This makes the metaverse and reality almost indistinguishable—which is a technical difficulty for the reader, in a thriller that relies a lot on the trick of flipping between the two. (I kept sensing the shadow presence of the *real*, real Hiro Protagonist, behind his metaverse "avatar" and his fictional one. The Woody Allen Hiro: a small, armed, round-shouldered, forthright white boy, with a row of pears drooping helplessly in his shirt pocket. . . .)

I digress. I'll forgive him his sharp white smile and his sexy, dangerous real mix. Mr. Protagonist, prince in exile, morally superior yet emotionally insecure, has the broody thrust of misplaced humility and the detail of social unease well down. The chopping to and fro between metaverse and reality is muddling, and defies chronology: but so far, Mr. Stephenson had my attention. What happens next is that the silly plot takes him out into the world. Generically speaking, programmers, like chess players, are not gentle people. They only look as though they're sitting there being round-shouldered and meek. Mr. Protagonist instantly becomes the proof of everything they ever told you about shoot-'em-up addiction. Snapping someone's head off in real life is dead easy. He feels nothing. The killing starts, the killing continues. The latter part of the book is simply a long dissolve into ultraviolence: human bodies paraded, chopped, fried, mashed. There's a lot of blood. Femoral and carotid arteries spout. Blood slicks on an Exxon scale feature heavily. The callousness of the good guys is leavened only by pained reproach when things get too gross.

Here's a mild outtake from where Hiro's female kid-sidekick has been helping to secure a sample of the evil drug.

The chopper pulls up into a hard turn, searching for additional prey, and something falls beneath it in a powerless trajectory, she thinks that it has dropped a bomb. But it's the head of the sniper, spinning rapidly, throwing out a fine pink helix under the light. The little chopper's rotor blade must have caught him in the nape of the neck. One part of her is dispassionately watching the head bounce and spin in the dust, and the other part of her is screaming her lungs out.

The sidekick's impulse to scream in disgust is supposed to be proof that her human feelings are intact. The gap-reflex is the nearest Stephenson's characters can manage to compassion, and they're touchingly proud of it.

Meanwhile, the plot develops by means of large, placid infodumps about Chomsky and Mesopotamian archaeology. Apparently a badkie is trying to control (by blitzing the elite brains of hackers with an evil drug; and by infecting the postliterate rest of us with an evil virus), a commodity known as *information*. It isn't necessary to be more specific. Removal of control, removal of competition is a good end of such a high order that no further explanation can be required.

We were warned. In the bravura opening passage, about delivering pizza for the Mafia, we were told that "The Deliverator knows everything about pizza. . . . A sentence or two later it is demonstrated that pizza-pickup is so fully automated that 'the Deliverator' need never have seen a pizza in his life. What he knows 'all about' is delivery. Distribution of the product. The ethos championed passionately in *Snow Crash* is not about saving the world. It is about *spreading things*: human bodies into jam; the mashed, unidentifiable benefits of 'freedom.' There's no material content in this philosophy, the nature of the *things* is irrelevant. It's very spiritual.

It transpires that the badkie has chosen to use, as vector of his infection, a Third World Invasion. The evil L. Bob Rife has bought the aircraft carrier Enterprise, mooseyed over to gook-land and brought back a huge conglomerated heap of boat people. Packs of survival-honed brutal Burians are to be cast ashore in their thousands, a terrifying prospect for the razor-wired "Burbalves" of well-fed white America. (Which still survives, just the way you knew it circa the last Michael J. Fox vehicle you hired.) In "the Raft" Mr. Stephenson has identified an up-to-date all-purpose Scare Thing, fascinating and exciting as Global Thermonuclear War. He's careful to sanitize the human element that might make the invocation of this "threat" morally dubious to some

oversensitive readers. By the time *those people* reach the suburbs, we're told, they've killed and eaten all the softer sort of their own kind, the ones you might feel sorry for. It is no longer relevant that the "Refus" are poor, hungry, despairing, disenfranchised. They're mad dogs: they deserve no one's pity.

Snow Crash exploits white America's fear of the barbarian other with total, cynical abandon. On the personal scale, the reverse of this coin is more tentatively examined. Fear and admiration for the barbarian is a twisted knot in the soul of the barbarian male. . . . Though Hiro is supposedly doing all this to get laid, the terrifying Juanita is so civilized that her presence would unman the narrative: she barely appears. She's replaced by a harmless *tubular rasa* of a "15 year old American blond chick," known as Y. T.; who exists to admire whatever hunky business is going on, and to despise anything female and even lower ("not even chicks. . .") in the hierarchy than herself. But Hiro's actual love affair (not overt!) He's no HOMO!!!) is with Raven, the *baddest mother-fucker in the world*. This Superman, bloodletter on a serious scale, represents perhaps the Wrath of God and the Revenge of the Third World. Since Hiro can't consummate his passion, Y. T. takes over for him, and provides one of the most bizarre moments in the novel. At her first appearance Y. T. assured the audience that her perky innocence on the savage streets wasn't as dumb as it seemed: "She wasn't scared, she was wearing her dentata. . . ." For the next three hundred or so pages of assorted gore the operation of this gruesome *dentata* thing has remained a mystery. Finally, impressed, consenting, and horny (as fifteen-year-old blond chicks always are in this sort of graphic novel), Y. T. gets down with the homicidal mutant. Overcome by lust, she forgets to remove her ultimate deterrent. Oh, horror, "A very small hypodermic needle slipped imperceptibly into the engorged frontal vein of his penis, automatically shooting a cocktail of powerful narcotics. . . . into his bloodstream."

Maybe you have to have ploughed your way through the morass of mashed human bodies on the way to this *very small needle*; maybe you even have to be a woman, to cackle the way I did at this juncture. . . . But hey, we could have the solution to the novel's emotional problems here. If Mr. Protagonist could be presented with the spectacle of myriads of *gentes* being slashed, whipped, minced, electrocuted, nuclear-machine-gunned and otherwise brutally abused. . . . maybe the boy would finally be able to feel something.

"The people of America," goes Stephenson's thesis, "live in the world's most surprising and terrible country." *Snow Crash* is unmitigatedly pompous about its very unsurprising terrors, but its deepest scorn is reserved for the people who have fled from the true America:

—They have parallel parked their bimbo boxes in identical computer designed Burbalve street patterns and sequestered themselves in symmetrical diatholes with vinyl floors. . . . a culture medium for a medium culture. . . .

At the same time, the novel manages to be firmly and pervasively on the side of "family values." *Snow Crash* characters do not do drugs. Apart from that one aberration, they do not do sex. The Mafia is big on tradition, on girls in kneecaps and boys who say "Sir!" a lot. Computer crazy kids are no way punks, never street people: they borrow Dad's computer to "date" in the Metaverse. Y. T., kidnapped onto the Raft, is oblivious to a world that might have challenged some of her squeaky-clean amorality. She sees Raven as a boyfriend who "dates" her, and expects what she gets: food and a temporary owner/bodyguard, exactly the way things are in the suburbs. Even the Raft folk have a grip of the essentials. When Hiro and the Mafia kids show up, a Filipino houseboy materializes to cook for them; so they don't have to embarrass themselves doing menial gook/girl-work. There's even some weird whimsy about faithful, cute, bionic pit-bulls, brave doggies whose Midnight Barking brings Disney into the bloodbath. Ultraviolence, we are given to understand, in no way contravenes the laws of Mom and apple pie.

It has been said that popular taste cannot handle the idea of there being more than two viewpoints on any subject. Anything more complicated than bad guys vs. good guys and you lose the mass market. And then there's the American liberal, who cannot handle one viewpoint. Mr. Stephenson, who would certainly sign himself a liberal, refuses to be labelled and docketed, nobly declines to take sides in any

debate whatsoever; and therefore becomes embroiled in fearful con-
 tortions when his ancient-conspiracy plot tries to force him to come down
 on the side of Good or Evil. There's more plot—acres of cyberpunk
 and fascist (I mean, literally) nonsense about Ancient Sumeria, meta-
 villains from space; acres of storyboarded chase-and-blow-up sequence,
 villains who carefully preserve the ONLY weapon that could be used
 against them. In spite of the standard pulp furniture, the final sequences
 are quite difficult to follow. When the characters start making Nietzschean
 pronouncements about how little it all matters, one can only
 sympathize. I think Stephenson manages to wriggle out of his philo-
 sophical dilemmas in the end. Even Juarez, it turns out, was only going
 after the "bad" guys because the Antichrist is a really interesting
 phenomenon.

Snow Crash has the marks of an IT junkie at work. Hiro gets
 "information," wads of it, by pressing a button: there's none of the
 discovery process that normal writers use to keep a thriller interesting.
 It's no accident, one can't help feeling, that the vivid parts of the book
 are videogame tracks; and where Hiro actually lives is a black box.
 Certainly this isn't a "good read" by any ordinary standards. But is it
 cyberpunk? This is the brainchild of a computer literate who finds no
 romance in the nature of the human/machine interface. The Metaverse
 is a wraparound game screen, nothing more. It's clear that the coming
 to consciousness of a "human" or quasi-divine AI would excite Hiro
 Protagonist about as much as a talking chicken might thrill a slaughter-
 house worker. And *Snow Crash* is not about how cheap and weird
 cybernetic technology may empower the powerless in the next few
 decades. Hiro was never powerless; and when he wants more power,

he uses a nuclear machine-gun. In 1984, *Neuromancer* gave tradi-
 tional, mainstream of a new kind of future. In the nineties, dreamy
 "cyberpunks" look like the successors of the hippies: so that it is already
 possible to talk of "aging cyberpunks" and cast about on the horizon for
 the next wave. *Snow Crash* seems only tangentially connected with
 either phenomenon. What it provides is a lurid snapshot of what
 happens in a society built on the fantasies of male adolescence, when that
 society is in catastrophic decline. Is that what cyberpunk was "all about"
 in terms of the real world—stripped of everything that made it interest-
 ing as science fiction? Maybe so. The dark ages are coming, boys.
 Have fun.

When I reached about page 103 of *Snow Crash*, I realized I was
 reading a cyberpunk version of *Raiders of the Last Ark*. At which point
 I fell about laughing; with Mr. Stephenson, not at him. However,
 leaving aside the fact that fate had me reviewing this on a bad weekend
 for lightweight nazi fantasy, there is too much of the stuff. The steroid-
 boosted bounties of the writing can't sustain the joke. It says here (inside
 the cover) that *Snow Crash* was first conceived as a computer-generated
 graphic novel. That's exactly what I think I've been reading: a
 splatter&gadgets comic with about 150,000 too many words. Indeed,
 in this form, Neal Stephenson's venture into science fiction would be so
 much the standard product it wouldn't rate a second glance. Don't be
 fooled; it still doesn't. ▶

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 White Queen.

Lord Kelvin's Machine by James P. Blaylock

Sauk City: Arkham House, 1992; \$19.95 hc; 263 pages

reviewed by James Cappel

Under the stewardship of James Turner, Arkham House has made
 a practice of putting interesting and important books in splendid
 packages. Lucius Shepard's *The Jaguar Hunter*, Bruce Sterling's *Cry-
 stal Expanse*, Michael Swanwick's *Gravity's Angels* and James Tiptree,
 Jr.'s *Her Smoke Rises Up Forever* are examples that come immediately to
 mind. Similar care has been taken with *Lord Kelvin's Machine*, from
 the ornamental running heads to the really remarkable illustrations by
 J.K. Potter. (My only quarrel is with one or two typos and the running
 feet, which are too small and much too closely related.)

Lord Kelvin's Machine is a set of three connected novellas that
 overlap with Blaylock's 1986 novel *Homunculus*. That earlier book
 recounts the adventures of a band of savants—reasonably typical
 Blaylockian eccentric savants—as they try to foil the villainous hunch-
 back Dr. Ignacio Narbondo and his ally, the crazed evangelist Shiloh,
 while seeking the truth about the homunculus of the title, which may
 or may not be aboard a haunted dirigible circling the Earth. *Homun-
 culus*, moreover, contains ancestors of several characters in Blaylock's
The Digging Leviathan (1984). The St. Ives clan in that book descends
 from Langdon St. Ives of *Homunculus*, and Dr. Narbondo is revealed
 to have survived for about a century in the guise of the mad psychiatrist,
 Dr. Hilario Frosticos.

Lord Kelvin's Machine might loosely be called a sequel to *Homun-
 culus*. (The first novella was actually published before *Homunculus*, in
Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, Mid-December 1985.) Several
 characters from *Homunculus* return in major roles, most impor-
 tantly St. Ives, along with his doughty gentleman's gentleman Hasbro,
 Dr. Narbondo, young Jack Owlsey, and the Secretary of the Royal
 Society, Parsons, whose insufferable officiousness and revolting gus-
 tatory habits left an indelible impression in the earlier book.

The primary link between the novellas is forged in a brief prologue.
 In a passage very similar in style and tone to the action sequences in
Homunculus, St. Ives pursues Narbondo, who has kidnapped St. Ives's
 young wife Alice (whose presence humanizes St. Ives's otherwise stiff
 character). Cornered and desperate, Narbondo kills Alice—not really
 intentionally—shattering St. Ives's hard-won tranquility and providing
 the emotional motor for all of his subsequent actions. St. Ives will
 frequently weary of the burdens attendant on saving the world, the

taste of revenge on Narbondo will turn to gall in his mouth, yet he will
 be driven by the memory of Alice.

Further linking the novellas is the eponymous machine. We see it
 first under construction in Lord Kelvin's barn—the same barn that was
 destroyed by the wayward spacecraft in *Homunculus*—in the Royal
 Society's misguided attempt to save the world from imminent destruc-
 tion by collision with a comet. Lord Kelvin's scheme is to repel the
 comet by reversing the Earth's magnetic field, a course St. Ives
 recognizes will alter the structure of time, saving the Earth only at
 unspeakable cost to its inhabitants. St. Ives therefore determines to
 sabotage the machine ("And if Lord Kelvin's machine was put into
 operation and was successful, then he'd quite probably face a jury of
 mutants—two-headed men and a judge with a third eye. They'd be
 sympathetic, under the circumstances, but still . . ."), and succeeds with
 the help of his old friend Bill Kraken, devoted reader of William
 Ashbless. It goes without saying that St. Ives has his own plan to avert
 catastrophe, the mirror image of Narbondo's plan to hasten it. Whereas
 Narbondo intends to exploit the harmonics of the hollow Earth in order
 to propel the planet square into the comet's path, St. Ives intends to
 exploit these harmonics to use legions of marching men to move the
 Earth to safety. St. Ives is obliged to pursue Narbondo to the uttermost
 reaches of Norway to foil his scheme, and this first part of the book
 climaxes with Narbondo's apparent drowning in a frozen lake.

A year later, in the second novella, "The Downed Ships" are
 mysteriously sinking in the English Channel, off Sterne Bay, and an
 extraordinary mother son team approaches St. Ives with letters purpor-
 tedly written by Narbondo after his apparent death in the Norwegian
 adventure, signed "H. Frost" and referring to notebooks that contain
 the secret of a serum to secure immortality. Of course, these events
 turn out to be unrelated. The ships are being pulled to the bottom of
 the channel by the magnetism generated by Lord Kelvin's machine,
 stolen at the beginning of the action by a band of criminals whose
 twofold aim is to extort money from Britain and to secure the note-
 books. The letters (brought to St. Ives by Willis Pule, Narbondo's
 assistant from *Homunculus*, and his mother) are indeed written by
 Narbondo, at least in part, for his experiments with carp, familiar from
Homunculus, have at last blossomed into the discovery of an elixir of

longevity. In fact, one of the band, the renegade cryogenicist Higgins, has fished Narbondo out of the Norwegian lake and proposes to revive him with the help of the notebooks. This, then, is the long-sought explanation of the mysterious transformation, in *The Digging Leviathan*, of Narbondo into Frosticus.

"The Downed Ships" is, as far as I know, unique in Baylock's oeuvre, in that it is narrated entirely in the first person—by St. Ives's feckless young companion Jack Owlesby, who plays pretty much the role he played in *Homunculus*, of the salt-of-the-earth foil to St. Ives whose principal virtue is being in the right (or wrong) place at the right (or wrong) time. Because Owlesby is naturally slower than St. Ives, the first-person narrative allows Baylock to unfold the action and its underlying purpose more gradually than he otherwise could, an advantage in a novella that is almost all action. The pacing effect is much like the one Conan Doyle achieved by using Watson as a foil for Sherlock Holmes. St. Ives is largely absent for the first half, appearing in time to explain the plot to Jack and to command a midnight attack on the criminals.

St. Ives ultimately achieves a split decision: he dynamites the machine, but the notebooks turn out to have been in the possession of Parsons all along. As if that were not bad enough, Parsons' claim to have destroyed the notebooks is a sham: in the very last sentence we see him making off with them and the body of Narbondo, which he plans to revive for the sake of scientific curiosity.

But the third novella, "The Time Traveler," opens about six months later with the revelation that St. Ives too has practiced a deception: he did not really destroy Lord Kelvin's Machine, but bided his time until he could recover it from the bottom of the sea, in order to convert it into a time machine with which to undo the death of Alice. In this way the book comes full circle: St. Ives can know he will succeed in traveling into the past, because he met himself trying to warn himself that night Alice died. Because no Baylock character ever takes the straightest path between two points when another is available, St. Ives becomes almost hopelessly embroiled in temporal paradox—running into himself, in contravention of the established conventions of time-travel stories, at almost every turn. Only after his first attempt to undo Alice's killing fails does he realize it had to, since he has already lived through it as his earlier self. He then travels back to 1835 in order to kill the child Narbondo. Moved to pity by the impoverished sick child, he not only fails but even moves forward to 1927 to obtain an infusion of penicillin from Alexander Fleming in order to save Narbondo. Finally, returning a second time to the night of the prologue, St. Ives succeeds in changing the past in the way he seeks, bringing about a happy ending.

Lord Kelvin's Machine would not appear to have the scope of such major Baylock novels as *The Last Coin* or *The Paper Grail*; it is more modest and, as the above summary suggests, interstitial. Nonetheless, it offers pleasures—some of which emerge only on second reading—commensurate with his other novels. Along with the relation to *Homunculus*, there is thematic continuity. For example, Baylock has always played with genre conventions, sometimes in completely unexpected contexts, so that it is not surprising to see him combining a set of science-fictional tropes that were already clichés in the nineteenth century: the threatened destruction of Earth by a comet, the hollow Earth, and the diversion of Earth from its orbit by harmonic disruption. This last gains resonance in light of the Catechism of Harmonics of K. W. Jeter's hilarious *Infernal Device*. (In this connection it should not be neglected that a choleric ally of Narbondo's, the anarchist Hargreaves, "hared the very art of constructing infernal devices.")

For book publication the first novella, published in *Anamor's* as "Lord Kelvin's Machine," has even been reedited, in obvious homage to Wells, "In the Days of the Comet." It is far from insignificant that at the very end of the book a journalist "implies" that the whole thing [the story of St. Ives's time machine] was quite likely a hoax perpetrated for the sake of the publicity by Mr. H. G. Wells, the fabulist. "The operative word here is *fabulist*. One occasionally sees the mock-Victorian works of Baylock, Jeter, and Tim Powers criticized for a lack of historical verisimilitude. In Baylock's case, at least, the charge is entirely beside the point. Like Wells, Baylock is writing fables. A fable should not be judged by historical accuracy so much as by the way it relates to, plays off of, other fables. Fable is the postmodernist genre par excellence, to

"All You Movers—"

... please remember to send us a change of address card, lest we lose you forever.

the extent it is concerned with other texts more than with the problematic reality outside the text. The case for Baylock as postmodernist and fabulist is scarcely forfeited: after all, he makes his living as a university teacher of English literature and is certainly aware of contemporary theory. (*Lord Kelvin's Machine* is one of his few books in which a character does not reflect at some point that "everything signifies.") We might also recall the incisive portrait of the deconstructionist Glenwood Touchey in *The Paper Grail*.) But for the fabulist, what is important is not whether all the historical details (for example, whether there really was, at the time of the action, an express train to Hammerfest such as St. Ives rides twice) are in place, but the use made of the materials handed down by his or her predecessors. And by this standard *Lord Kelvin's Machine* is a success.

I take a clear indication of Baylock's method to lie in the existence of a contradiction in the time scheme of *Lord Kelvin's Machine*. *Homunculus* is explicitly set in 1875. The action of *Lord Kelvin's Machine* occurs later than *Homunculus* (except, of course, for the episode of the child Narbondo in 1835), but it is unclear how much later. In the only internal temporal reference in the entire book, St. Ives remarks that "[t]hey [the conspirators in "The Downed Ships"] think that they're an ace away from immortality. Narbondo very nearly had it ten years ago, back when he was stealing carp out of the aquarium and working with Willis Pale." That entails that "The Downed Ships" is set in 1885. However, references to events external to the narrative make this impossible. In "In the Days of the Comet" St. Ives refers to having met the young Ernest Rutherford in Canada and learned of his discovery of alpha and beta rays. That discovery, however, occurred, in 1899, and Rutherford's sojourn in Canada, at McGill University, lasted from 1898 to 1907. Furthermore, in "The Downed Ships" Parsons refers to J. J. Thomson's work on electrons; this may refer to Thomson's 1899 discovery of the electron's negative charge, but cannot in any event have occurred earlier than Thomson's 1897 discovery of the electron. Baylock is neither careless nor uninformed (in St. Ives's dream of Lord Kelvin in "The Time Traveler," there is the nice detail of Lord Kelvin's wearing a watch chain of "transatlantic cable," a matter in which Kelvin was one of the world's leading experts), and one can only conclude that this easily discoverable contradiction is deliberate. Why would any writer do this? No explanation answers but the desire to call attention to the artificiality of the literary work, thereby undermining our expectation of verisimilitude—exactly the kind of thing the father of postmodernism, Baylock's great master Sterne, does on virtually every page of *Tristram Shandy*.

It need hardly be pointed out that Sterne is not only the father of postmodernism, but of modernism, romanticism, realism, symbolism, German irony, and, most clearly, the Pre-Joycean Fellowship, among others, as was proven once and for all by Wayne C. Booth in his "Thomas Mann and Eighteenth-Century Comic Fiction," *Furioso* (Winter 1951), reprinted in *Now Don't Try to Reason With Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 273-285.

Of course, *The Time Machine* was actually published in 1895, and would therefore have been fresh in the minds of Baylock's characters if *Lord Kelvin's Machine* is indeed set at the turn of the century. Reference to Wells is appropriate for another reason, however. The characterization of Wells's works as "scientific romances" and Wells's acknowledgment of the influence of Stevenson call attention to the pure adventure element in Baylock's work. Not that we could well miss it—St. Ives is Baylock's most active protagonist, the Indiana Jones of the Victorian era—but the most interesting thing in following Baylock is to see how he balances his two guiding and complementary influences, Sterne and Stevenson. (I called attention to these influences in my review of *The Paper Grail*, *NTRSF* #37, September 1991). In *Lord*

Kelvin's Machine the balance is subtle. This appears at first to be one of Baylock's more Stevensonian books: there is little if any apparent Sternean characterization, even though much of "The Downed Ships" is set in Sterne Bay. We are forced to reassess that impression, though, early in "The Time Traveler":

A fly circled lazily over the clutter on the desk, and St. Ives whacked at it suddenly with a book, knocking it to the floor. The fly staggered around as if drunk. In a fit of remorse, St. Ives scooped it up on a sheet of paper, walked across and opened the French window, and then dumped the fly out into the bushes. "Go," he said hopefully to the fly, which buzzed around aimlessly, somewhere down in the bushes.

This passage will bring readers familiar with *Tristram Shandy* up short, because it is a blatant remnant of the famous conclusion of Volume III, Chapter IV of *Tristram Shandy*:

Heartily and from my soul, to the protection of that Being who will injure none of us, do I recommend you [Tristram is addressing his reviewers] and your affairs,—so God bless you,—only next month, if any one of you should gnash his teeth, and storm and rage at me, as some of you did last MAY, (in which I remember the weather was very hot)—don't be exasperated, if I pass it by again with good temper,—being determined as long as I live or write (which in my case means the same thing) never to give the honest gentleman a worse word or worse wish, than my uncle Toby gave the fly which buzz'd about his nose all dinner time,—"Go,—go poor devil," quoth he,—"get thee gone,—why should I hurt

thee? This world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me."

Baylock could scarcely offer a more explicit invitation to identify St. Ives with My Uncle Toby instead of My Father, whose lunatic philosophical and scientific speculations might make him seem a more appropriate candidate, and specifically with respect to Sterne's doctrine of sentiment, of which the incident of the fly was the most famous illustration in Sterne's own time. "Sentiment" here does not mean mere sentimentalism, although Sterne sometimes made dangerous approaches in this direction: it is rather the kind of disinterested benevolence best expressed in the line "This world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me." St. Ives, who is close to demented when the incident with the fly occurs, undergoes what amounts to a conversion to the doctrine of sentiment. St. Ives is seen at the beginning of "The Time Traveler" inflicting petty cruelty, painful for the reader, on his housekeeper, Mrs. Langley. Yet when he goes back to 1835 he cannot bring himself to kill Nabondo: the world is wide enough for the two of them. So much so that St. Ives even makes a second trip to 1835 to save the young Nabondo, returning immediately afterward to undo the harm to Mrs. Langley. St. Ives's reward for becoming "sentimental," learning to appreciate the humanity of others, even his archenemy, is to get his life back.

Lord Kelvin's *Machine* is not quite in the same league as such major Baylock novels as *The Last Coin* or *The Paper Grass*; but this is due in part to the fact that it is a sequel of sorts. For that reason it is obviously not ideal for readers new to Baylock, but it is a worthy successor to *Homunculus* and will be indispensible to Baylock fans. ▶

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Remaking History by Kim Stanley Robinson

New York: Tor Books, 1991; \$18.95 hc; 274 pages
reviewed by Amy Axt Hanson

Remaking History is a dead-on title for Kim Stanley Robinson's latest collection of short stories, since much of Robinson's work deals with the changeable nature of history. He knows that history isn't a static collection of facts. Events change with the retelling. Interpretations vary with each new historian. And documentation makes all the difference. What Robinson doesn't know, but clearly suspects, is that the future is also in flux, varying with our every act.

As a collection, most of Robinson's latest stories are strong and engaging, and highlight his knack for drawing vivid, unique settings. The title story follows a day in the life of several engineers on Luna Three who, for fun, are remaking an old TV docudrama about the rescue of American hostages from Teheran. Only in this alternate history, the rescue mission to the American embassy was successful, and all 53 hostages were freed. On the lunar set, the actors aren't sure how to portray their characters—were they the heroes as portrayed by De Niro and company or were they just regular guys caught in urgent circumstances? In other words, do heroes make history or does history make heroes? The lunar crew finds out when life imitates art and the escape is for real.

"Remaking History" is a stark piece, with the blacked-out embassy compound set against brilliant white stars overhead. We feel the confusion as helicopters roar, rescuers get lost, and actors career around tight angles in low gravity. By contrast, a calmer story—and one in reds and purples—is "Rainbow Bridge." This superb magical realism piece recounts a teenage boy's visit to a Navajo reservation. Here's how Robinson describes the boy's arrival just ahead of a storm:

Overhead clouds like great dark lobes of marble filled the western sky. The setting sun leaked under the edge of this front, and glazed everything with a harsh orange glare. We stood on a broad, high, bare tableland; the horizon was an immense distance away. The blacktop road merged with the dark land to east and west, one shadow ribbon among many. (p. 120)

Equally vivid are scenes from "A Transect," an horrific fantasy in which a North American paper salesman has a midnight train encounter with a South African migrant worker half a world away. "The train jerked and they bumped together hard; the black man reached out a hand to hold him steady, then withdrew as if shocked, his frightened eyes round and white in the gloom. Their gazes met and held" (pp. 233-4).

In the nightmare "Before I Wake," normal people are suddenly unable to distinguish between reality and dreaming. One scientist works frantically to devise a counter-acting agent—or maybe that's just one of his dreams.

As a writer, Robinson often wrestles with the nature of heroism and whether or not one person can significantly change the tide of history. In his novel *The Memory of Whiteness* (Tor, 1985), the hero is a musical prodigy who changes music by uniting it with cosmology. In the novella *Green Mars* (Tor, 1985), a burned-out politician reconciles himself to the fact that he'll never stop the terraforming of Mars.

What can one man do? In the short story "The Lunatics," one man can be an enslaved lunar promethium miner whose ability to recall his earlier life on Earth sparks friends to go renegade. Together they tunnel to the surface to destroy the city where promethium is sold.

In "Our Town," one man can be an ex-sculptor who rejects art and homeland. It's left unsaid, but no doubt his knowledge of the city's workings will be useful to his new compatriots, who are trying to bring down the spire city Carthage by cracking its base with fire and water.

In "Vinland the Dream," that one man is an anti-hero: a man so obsessed with Viking settlements that he constructs settlements of his own and plants literary allusions in old books, hoping that later generations will believe them real.

On the whole, most stories in *Remaking History* are strong and engaging. A few don't work as well, for various reasons. One example is "Down and Out in the Year 2000," in which Lee Robinson struggles to survive in the burned-out ghetto city of Washington D.C. With a predictable conflict and a too-familiar setting, the story just doesn't hold the reader's interest.

"Down and Out . . ." also suffers from wooden characterization, a problem that bedevils much of Robinson's work. Perhaps his characters would be more interesting if they didn't all speak with the same voice, and if their conversations rang true with real speech. Or perhaps Robinson is working too hard at characterization; he should relax and let his people show themselves through telling quirks of speech and behavior, rather than in paragraphs outlining motivations. Robinson knows how to use psychological details to serve mood and setting. In "A Transcend," for example, such details make the reader's hair stand on end.

Robinson should be commended for never taking the easy path; he chooses characters and conflicts that aren't pat or stereotyped. And he experiments with format, using the conventions of science in the service of fiction. Witness "The Blind Geometer," his 1987 Nebula award-winning story about a blind mathematician embroiled in international intrigue. No simple story about a handicapped detective, this: Robinson adds layers by pinpointing each scene along a three-dimensional projection of a triangle.

In *Remaking History*, his stylistic experiments continue. In "Vinland the Dream," Robinson uses the format of scientific journal articles (i.e. Abstract, Introduction, Experimental Methods, Discussion, Conclusions, Acknowledgements) to frame an archaeologist's angst over faked Viking settlements in Canada. Test results prove the settlements are only 140 years old, rather than 700. "Vinland" as a story is an engaging read; unfortunately, the format doesn't work well because it sets up the reader to believe that the abstract is an abstract of the story. Rather, each subhead simply divides an otherwise smooth read.

As a final note, the stories in *Remaking History* are stronger than those in Robinson's scardier short story collection, *The Planet on the Table* (Tor, 1986). Robinson has become a more subtle writer with time, and he can better track characters and action so the reader doesn't get confused. Several stories in *Planet* explored settings that appeared in later novels. If *Remaking History* follows suit, the coming years hold a lot of interesting reading. ▶

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Robert Sheekley Memories of the 50s (Part I)

In those days, in the fifties, my world of science fiction centered around Horace Gold, editor of *Galaxy* magazine. The center of that center was the Friday night poker game at Horace's apartment in Snayesant Town in New York City. It was nickel and dime poker, with raises up to a quarter. No more than three raises per round. Sandbagging allowed. Dealer's choice, the usual games being 5, 6 or 7 card hi-lo, often with a "tiddle"—an optional replacement of the last card. Some of the regular players were myself, Phil Klass, Fred Pohl, Jerome Bixby, A.J. Budrys, Jerome Stenton, Alfie Bester, and Horace and Evelyn. Many others played from time to time: John Cage, Louis Barron, and almost any science fiction writer who happened to be in town and could afford to lose up to about five dollars, maybe ten on a really bad night.

Horace was an energetic, balding man who never came out of his apartment. He suffered, I was told, from agoraphobia brought on by experiences during World War II. Whatever it was, it didn't impair his writing or editorial abilities, which were formidable. Since he didn't go out, the world came to him. Doctors, dentists, barbers, there seemed to be nothing he couldn't arrange for him at his apartment. His wife, Evelyn, was as energetic as he.

Horace's apartment was the center of science fiction for me in those days. The other center was John W. Campbell, whom I knew only slightly. Campbell's ideational and storymaking abilities were formidable. I submitted a story idea to him once, on the then-new idea of psi talents. I got back a several page letter with enough ideas and plot lines to keep me busy for a decade. I never did anything much with Campbell's ideas, however. The social sciences approach in *Galaxy*—"soft" science fiction—was much more my kind of thing, and Horace kept me thoroughly occupied for a number of years. I visited John Campbell once, coming out to his home in New Jersey at his invitation. I was impressed and overawed by him. Although I sold him a number of stories, I never worked directly with him and never saw him again.

Apart from the poker games, the only other times I'd visit Horace would be to bring over a story I had just written to deadline. I lived in the West Village then. I'd get on my scooter and ride over to Snayesant Town on E. 14th Street. I'd go up to Horace's floor and press the bell. Sometimes Horace would answer. Often, there'd be no reply and I'd slide the story under the door. Usually, the phone would be ringing by the time I got back to my apartment.

Horace bought almost my entire output. The few he didn't want, which were sometimes outright fantasy or just plain weird, I was usually able to sell to Lester del Rey, who was editing *Infinity*, or to *Amazing* and *Fantastic* under Howard Browne.

In those days I also saw a lot of Lester del Rey and his then wife, Evelyn. I'd go out to Red Bank, New Jersey, where they lived, and we'd play bridge half the night and talk. Before he moved to Red Bank, I also used to see Lester when he lived on West 19th Street in Manhattan. He

had the strangest office I've ever seen. It was like a telephone booth built into the middle of his living room. It fit one person, barely. When you opened the door, the desk would drop into place, the overhead light would go on, and a fan would start up. Pencils, erasers, dictionary, all were close to hand. It was more like a sarcophagus than an office, but it suited Lester well.

A.J. Budrys was one of my regular friends, as was Michael Shaara, the misanthrope of Jersey City, a vastly amusing man usually in a black mood. My best friend in those days was Phil Klass, who wrote under the pen name of William Tenn. We lived close to each other in the Village, and often walked the streets late at night, talking up a storm and drinking a lot of coffee in Figaro and other cafes. It was still the Bohemian, beat Village back then, with Bob Dylan appearing at The Far Black Pussy Cat and Max Baer holding forth at one bar or another.

Phil and I were always discussing our writing problems, specifically, our blockages. Sometimes we'd try out various schemes to overcome them. At one time we agreed to meet at a coffee shop in the morning, then go to our respective apartments to work. We'd meet again at the end of the day and show each other the pages we'd done. But we both had an aversion to showing first-draft work, so we'd only show the pages upside down, with the other promising not to read them. We were on our honor to present new copy for this non-reading, not last week's or last month's stuff.

Our most elaborate scheme involved a plan to share an office which would contain a desk, a chair, and a bed. This was standard Greenwich Village furnishings. The only unusual feature was the chain, which was the heart of the plan. We planned to buy a sturdy chain and padlock. One of us would chain the other to the chair. The Imprisoned Writer would only be let free after he had completed a set number of pages. The other was free to lie on the bed and read pulp magazines until it was his turn to take the chair. We never did put that plan into operation.

There were many science fiction writers in New York in the fifties. Alfie Bester, dapper and high-spirited, was always good company. I saw a little of Bob Silverberg, who owed us by his organization and high-level production. It is still a mystery to me how he could produce so much high-level copy so regularly. Harlan Ellison came onto the scene then, making the transition from awed newcomer to brilliant professional in an amazingly short time. I met Robert A. Heinlein once, at the home of John Pierce in New Jersey. Heinlein was utterly charming, a fine conversationalist, an impressive man. We talked late into the night on that memorable occasion. There was always someone around to talk shop with, and there were always short story markets hungry for stories. It was a fine time. We shall not see it so many again.

Science fiction was still a ghetto literature then. When people asked you what you wrote, and you said, slightly shamefacedly, "science fiction," people usually asked you, "What is that?" Then as now, we

impact, it is improbable to call up such sentiment over a mere starship. Most people today don't care, *Star Trek* notwithstanding. What would change that in a century?

What this amounts to is that the book is not a prediction of tomorrow, but a not-too-skilfully dressed-up version of today, in which the importance of starships preempts far more pressing economic and social concerns. This may be true for the science fiction community, but there's not much concern elsewhere.

Now... *The Quiet Pool* is still a good book, and certainly a solid science fiction thriller, but it's not a great book. The underlying theme—the Chi Sequence—is scarcely new, and the high number of fundamental improbabilities shows a lack of understanding of sociology, overall human nature, economics, energy and politics.

A Fire Upon the Deep by Vernor Vinge

New York: Tor Books, 1992; \$22.95 hc; 416 pages
reviewed by Martin Morse Wooster

It has now been nearly twenty-five years since the Old Wave/New Wave controversy of the 1960s. Although the Old Wave ultimately won the battle, it lost the war. Many of the Old Wave writers became bestselling authors of the 1980s, but the doubts that the New Wave authors had about the validity and vitality of traditional modes continued to grow and spread.

One generation later, these doubts about "hard" science fiction have now become clichés. When critics think about hard sf at all, they tend to assume the following prejudices: hard sf is primarily written for engineers and techno-needs (in Ben Bova's memorable phrase, for "guys with rivets in their heads"); and the Ph.D.'s who produce hard sf novels in their leisure time are so busy dumping technical data into their books that they are usually unable to produce fiction that has any degree of psychological subtlety or literary merit. Therefore hard sf is a fading, obsolete form.

These clichés, like most commonplaces, have some validity. Few hard sf writers are as accomplished stylists as Kim Stanley Robinson, Lucius Shepard, or Gene Wolfe. But hard sf as a form has been evolving—and advancing—as steadily as other types of science fiction. Consider the case of Vernor Vinge.


Certainly Vinge has the requisite credentials for the hard sf writer. He has a doctorate in mathematics, and is a professor of computer science at San Diego State University. Many of his first stories were bought by John W. Campbell.

Yet Vinge also has much in common with the cyberpunk writers. Like them, he has an intense interest in studying how computers have changed the nature of communication. His novella "True Names" (1981), for example, was as important in defining today's computer-subculture as was *Neuromancer*. Yet there is nothing "punk" about Vinge's work; there's certainly nothing in his work that conveys an overwhelming desire to rebel against existing conventions. Think of Vinge as the first cousin of a cyberpunk—a cyberharlot, perhaps.

Moreover, in one important sense, *A Fire Upon the Deep* is a postmodernist book. Information is the currency that fuels Vinge's future; a villain proves his power not because of his wealth or his armies, but his ability to send a message comprising "four hundred seconds of broad-band, so rich that it gives full-sense imagery for many different races." For much of *A Fire Upon the Deep*, the only reality that matters is what a computer screen can convey.

In his new novel, Vinge creates a universe divided into three zones. First and most rarefied is the Transcend, where organic and machine intelligences can achieve near-godlike powers. The largest section, wherein the novel is set, is the Beyond, whose inhabitants are united in a sort of intergalactic computer network, which, thanks to simultaneous, instantaneous translation, unites most of the universe in a ceaseless flow of comments, reports, summaries, and badinage. In the Beyond, many physical "laws" no longer apply—light-speed, for example, is no longer a barrier. The third area is the Slowness, which includes Earth. In "slow" areas, the traditional laws of physics apply. Since the residents of "slow" areas cannot tap into the information net, these worlds are forgotten backwaters, "the domain of cretins and mechanical calculators." In the human-dominated Traumli Realm, a corrupt archive, billions of years old, has been discovered and opened,

Those failures certainly won't throw a thriller off track—in fact, remedying them would probably detract from the popularity of any thriller, since one of the goals of such novels is to suspend reality, not to remind readers about it—and in this, Kube-McDowell succeeds, at least for those less skeptical than this curmudgeon.

Liked the book, but as far as it being all the things the jacket reviews state... well, the job of jacket blurbs is to sell books. It's too bad that we need all that hype. Still... the questions posed by Kube-McDowell are good, and the writing game you along... perhaps not far enough, but enough for a good time. 


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releasing a malign Transcendent being with the power to destroy the net entirely, thus eliminating galactic civilization. And as the "Traumli Perversion" expands with the inevitability of an intergalactic computer virus, a lone Traumli starship, which may be carrying the secret to stopping the Perversion, crashes on a backwater planet only barely over the line into the Beyond, and two children survive—Jeff Olmsdot, age 8, and Johanna Olmsdot, age 14. The Olmsdot children find themselves captives of opposing armies in a planetary civil war. Will the rescue ship *Out of Band* be able to elude other starships to save Jeff and Johanna? Will the Traumli Perversion be checked? Will the planetary civil war ever end?

The plot of *A Fire Upon the Deep* is thus far more complex (and far longer) than those of Vinge's previous four novels. Certainly much of the book is first-rate sf. Vinge uses his knowledge of computers and nets to ensure that the background of his universe is solid and plausible. As John Clute observes in his review in *Interzone*, it is quite hard for a science fiction writer to show the *warms* of a given universe. By devising an intergalactic computer net that instantly conveys news from the most remote sectors of the universe, Vinge solves this problem with relative ease. Occasional set-pieces, such as the complete collapse of a vast orbital platform habitat supported by antigravity generators, show that Vinge is capable of providing the sorts of transcendent pleasures Doc Smith once offered. (Unlike most of Doc Smith's fair maidens, however, the women in *A Fire Upon the Deep* are more competent than the men.)

If Vinge had stuck to the story of the war against the Traumli Perversion, *A Fire Upon the Deep* could have been a masterpiece. But Vinge spends much of the book describing the civil war between the two factions that have captured the Olmsdot siblings. This war is only mildly interesting; most of the characters are generic, and many of the scenes of the feuding and scowling between rival alien generals have been done far better by other novelists.

When Vinge concentrates on a single theme, however, he can be superb. In his previous novel, *Marooned in Realtime* (1986), Vinge successfully conveyed the sense of traveling through billions of years of time in a way that equalled and occasionally surpassed Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*. The planet-bound Vinge is an average sf writer; the Vinge who roams the computer nets is a major figure in the field. Had he stuck with the plots where his writing abilities are strongest, *A Fire Upon the Deep* might have been a first-rate novel; as it stands the novel is a competent adventure novel with flashes of brilliance.

As Patrick L. McGuire notes in *Twentieth Century Science-Fiction Writers*, any Vinge novel "has one of the most enviable 'battering averages' in sf... the steady accumulation of solid work will indeed earn him a major reputation with the passing of years." Certainly *A Fire Upon the Deep*, Vinge's longest and most complex book, is worth reading, but the novel, despite its occasional brilliance, is not Vinge's best. Were Vinge able to combine the intricacies of *A Fire Upon the Deep* with the transcendent power that made *The Peace War* and *Marooned in Realtime* among the more important books of the '80s, he would produce a novel that would certainly be a milestone in contemporary sf. 

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Screed (letters of comment)

James Cappio, Brooklyn, New York

There's only one masturbatory pleasure more intense than rereading one's own writing, and since the intervals at which one can practice the former increase with age, I recently found myself rereading my own essay on K. W. Jeter (*NYRSF* #44). I remain satisfied on the whole, but one point that requires qualification leapt out at me. I criticized Jeter's new horror novel, *Wolf Flow*, as derivative, cardboard, and, in short, a repudiation of all the qualities that had made his earlier horror novels the generally remarkable works they are. Rereading my description of *Wolf Flow*, it struck me—to my astonishment, only for the first time—that the novel is a satire on the tired conventions I took it to embody. To take only the most obvious example, the derelict resort hotel in which the novel is mostly set and the hallucinations of its past denizens suffered by the protagonist are patently inspired by *The Shining*, but are so over the top that it's hard, on reflection, not to suspect parodic intent. Similarly for many other details in *Wolf Flow*. That this interpretation didn't even occur to me surprises me all the more, considering that I wrote at some length about the comic elements in Jeter's other current novel, *Madlands*.

I have not had an opportunity to actually reread *Wolf Flow*, so I do not have a final judgment to offer. (I'd point out in my own defense that the editors of *Review*, possibly bludgeoned into submission by the length of my piece, did not raise the possibility that the book is a satire.) If I was wrong, I apologize to Jeter, and recommend in any event that readers of *Wolf Flow* take it as comic.

[One of the editors of this review edited some of K. W. Jeter's novels, and he knows that K. W. Jeter is a very sly writer.—GVG]

Taras Wolansky, Jersey City, New Jersey

The January 1992 *NYRSF* (#41) is a remarkable if inadvertent case study of the response of the adversary culture—the "Left," if you will—to the victory of the capitalist West in the Cold War. (Why this adversary culture exists, that is, why people who are neither technologists nor capitalists are disaffected from a civilization based upon capitalism and technology, I need not go into here.) Four different reviewers respond to this historical turning point in what strikes me as a stereotyped and sometimes rather absurd fashion. The writers, and the works they chose to review, are: James Morrow on *War Stars*, by H. Bruce Franklin; John Clute on *Beauty*, by Sheri S. Tepper; Robert Kilheffer on *Ishmael*, by Daniel Quinn; and Richard Terra on *A Woman of the Iron People*, by Eleanor Amason.

One way to deal with the West's victory is simple denial. This approach is taken by James Morrow and Richard Terra.

Warning us against "undue euphoria," Morrow turns the clock back to 1988, and reviews a book which attacks America's "nuclear worship" from the standpoint of what was then an increasingly isolated political fringe. (Author H. Bruce Franklin, who probably wishes the other side won the Cold War, has written elsewhere that in Korea the Chinese withstood America's chemical and bacteriological attacks, as well as the American forces' numerical superiority.) Morrow writes, "America has been singularly transfixed by super-weapons, paradoxically seeking deliverance from war through the machines of war." All of which makes me wonder what it was that kept the Cold War cold for two generations, if it was not "superweapons!"

Like many on the Left, Morrow seems to find strategic defense—missiles aimed at missiles—more reprehensible than missiles aimed at people. He is particularly struck by Franklin's observation that early in his career Ronald Reagan starred in "a minor effort called *Murder in the Air*, in which our future president . . . blasts a spy plane out of the air with an 'inertia ray projector' . . . destined to become 'the greatest force for world peace ever discovered.'" We're not told just what movie Mikhail Gorbachev starred in, that made him constantly push SDI to the forefront of all arms negotiations.

Richard Terra praises Eleanor Amason's novel of interstellar exploration: "She presents a conception of the future human history that is refreshingly out of step with the current self-congratulatory arrogance about the 'triumph' of capitalism and western-style demo-

cracy . . . Most [of the humans] are social democrats or Marxists who look back at the excesses of a capitalist world system in our times with horror, disgust and pity." Yes, and their space ship is powered by plutonium!

It is entirely legitimate for an sf writer to refuse to accept the Welfare Capitalist State as the "end of history." However, the writer's responsibility is to give us new, imaginative alternatives to this economic system, not old, discredited alternatives.

The second approach to the victory of the West is to insist that the West hasn't really won anything because it will also collapse, real soon now. (The Left has been predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism for 150 years or more.) And in spite of the evidence from Eastern Europe, that capitalism has done a much better job of protecting the environment than socialism, the preferred method of collapse is nonetheless ecological. This is the approach taken by John Clute and Robert Kilheffer.

Clute writes, "This global warming talk," says [a student to a college instructor], "is left-wing." . . . There is no more talk of global warming." Now, things may be different in the British Isles but in North America, at least, it is the student who is reluctant to contradict the views of his instructor, no matter how foolish, and not the other way around.

Clute continues, "The message [of Sheri Tepper's *Beauty*] is that we have finished ourselves off, that it is too late, that the minds of an economics class in London will not be cleared of maya in time to save the world . . ." To get some idea of how confused and equivocal the evidence for and against global warming really is, see the review article in the April, 1992 issue of *Natural History*.

Of Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*, Robert Kilheffer informs us, "Only the most minuscule of plots lurks behind the long, thoughtful exchanges, and the characters of the narrator and Ishmael are no more than schematic . . . Though this may sound to some like a cure for insomnia, *Ishmael* is never for a moment dull or slow-moving."

How can this be, we wonder. Kilheffer explains: "By and large, Quinn's analysis rings perfectly true. In some ways, I was almost disappointed because there were few things I had not thought myself, when I have tried to figure out the source of our world's ills . . ."

In other words, the book's wisdom consists in agreeing with the reviewer! It is a truism that the quickest way to a good review is riding on the back of the reviewer's hobby horses. But usually reviewers are not so naively obvious about it.

Kilheffer summarizes some of Quinn's deep insights. "Essentially, pre-agricultural humans . . . lived for three millions years . . . hunting and gathering what they needed, with their population remaining mostly constant at the level their habitats could support . . . life for these humans was not a constant battle for survival, but a rather peaceful and leisurely coexistence."

There is something wrong with this picture. If the "Leaver" (hunter-gatherer) lifestyle really were so stable and idyllic, "with only two or three hours a day of what you would call work," why did hunter-gatherers in so many corners of the world independently give it up for agriculture? (Apparently, population growth left them no alternative. So much for the stability of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle.)

In what Kilheffer calls "one of the most effective moments in the book," Ishmael the telepathic gorilla turns his attention to the Bible. "Cain is very specifically identified as an agriculturalist, a tiller of the soil, and Abel . . . keeps the traditional Leaver life of a herder. Yet it is Cain who murders, and Cain who is cast out, accused by God. Ishmael explains that the story of Cain and Abel must have originated among the Leaver cultures in the Mesopotamian region, who were suddenly encountering extremes of hostility from the farming peoples."

Again, there is something wrong with this picture. If herdsmen—like the Huns and the Mongols—encountered "extremes of hostility" from the settled peoples around them, they earned every bit of it. In light of what the Bible tells us the nomadic Hebrews did to the more settled Canaanites, I suggest another explanation. The story of Cain and Abel was told by herdsmen to justify their depredations upon farmers.

couldn't define science fiction. We just knew it as something the rest of the world didn't do, something that was Our Thing, something that existed apart from literature, a thing of ideas, moods and quirks.

The audience was small, back in those pre-*Star Trek* days. SF movies were in their rudimentary pre-Spielberg pre-Lucas stage. We lamented among ourselves, "If only they could get the special effects

right!" Little knowing that special effects would become the *raison d'être* of science fiction movies, breeding high-budget instant impact Terminator and RoboCops to the exclusion of anything with real ideological content, replacing drama with action and situation with setup. ▶

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A Thriller Built on Quicksand
***The Quiet Pools* by Michael P. Kube-McDowell**
New York: Ace Books, 1991; \$4.50 pb; 373 pages
reviewed by L. E. Modesitt, Jr.

According to the jacket copy, *The Quiet Pools* is "a tense thriller." On one level, that description is certainly correct. The book opens with an eco-terrorist weapon—a tanker filled with hazardous chemicals—being driven at the front of Allied Transcon corporate headquarters in Houston. Even before these industrial poisons have finished splintering across the front of the building, "Jeremiah"—a voice of ecological concern—has preempted the world-wide ComNet to announce this retaliation against Transcon in the name of Gaia, Earth, the Homeworld.

Why Transcon? Is it Allied Transcon's big project—the Diaspora operation to build five city-sized starships, each designed to carry 12,000 men, women, and children to the stars? The first ship, the *Ur*, set off in 2083. It is now 2094, and the second ship, the *Memphis*, is less than a year from being completed in orbit around Earth.

Who is the hidden Jeremiah? And why do the environmental activists target Allied Transcon?

Kube-McDowell then introduces Christopher McCutcheon and the conflicts of his "trine" (three-way family/marriage) with the older and experienced artist Loi and the younger and sexy Jessie. McCutcheon is a twenty-seven-year-old archeobiologist and a part of a team whose job is to build the most comprehensive data-base library possible for the *Memphis*.

After McCutcheon, Kube-McDowell introduces Mikhail Dryke, the head of corporate security for Allied Transcon and the official responsible for finding the elusive Jeremiah and his Homeworld organization. With the book's opening attack, Homeworld has attempted and succeeded in staging six assaults against the massive corporation—a twenty-first century fusion of Mitsubishi, Rockwell, and Exxon. So far Homeworld has managed to execute each assault without harming any people—damaging only Transcon facilities, including offices, an unmanned space launch, and a data center. Whoever or whatever Jeremiah and Homeworld are, they are adept at subverting the international and corporate data-nets for their purposes, and Dryke is frustrated and angry.

The visage of Jeremiah presented on the video is a computer construct, but the questions and issues he raises are all familiar: Why do people allow corporations to destroy the earth that nurtures us? Why are we spending billions of dollars on star travel when the earth is bleeding? And who will take the responsibility for fighting these wrongs?

As in any good thriller, the characters proliferate—we meet, among others, William McCutcheon, Chris's father, a wealthy biomechanical engineer, land broker, and political consultant; Hiroko Sasaki, the Director of the Diaspora Project; Thomas Tidwell, the inquiring historian; Daniel Keith, Chris's friend and confidant; Malena Graham, the beautiful and partly crippled bodywork counselor.

Violence and discontent plague the partially homogenized world culture, growing as the book progresses, pitting the outsiders against both the project and the "starheads"—space travel groupies who lack talent or skills but who would sell their bodies and their souls to obtain a place on the *Memphis*. The outsiders are environmental purists, such as the unknown Jeremiah, who sees the Diaspora Project as an excuse for the corporate hegemonies that apparently run this future society to continue plundering the environment and various attacks against potential starship colonists or crew or Transcon personnel.

The outsiders identify with the Homeworld movement, calling themselves Homeworlders, and begin harassing the starheads. Har-

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assment escalates to scattered attacks and riots, and then to murder.

Throughout the first part of the book, the underlying questions are: Who is Jeremiah and what does he want? As in life, the answers are never quite clear, even when Jeremiah almost destroys the entire data and computer system for the *Memphis*, even when Mikhail Dryke finally tracks down and reveals Jeremiah.

But the discovery and death of Jeremiah, the breakdown of Chris's marriage, his dismissal from Allied Transcon—partly because of the bootleg recording and perversion of one of his small concert performances—and the relentless animosity of Dryke force Chris to confront and resolve an even deeper question: Why were the *Ur* and the *Memphis* built? Both the strengths of the book and its problems lie in the fact that it is a thriller. The action is quick, the characters are intriguing for the most part, especially since few—even Jeremiah—are merely two-dimensional, and intricate sexual and psychological motivations twist through all the main characters. To discover the real Jeremiah, so to speak, Christopher McCutcheon must discover his own hidden past and the terrible secret behind the Diaspora Project.

Unfortunately, much of the book, like so many other thrillers, is based on enormous improbabilities. The first improbability is that any one man, even with enormous resources in a highly computerized society, could successfully create and maintain a world-wide environmental golems campaign.

The second improbability is the unlikelihood of Jeremiah's remaining undiscovered for so long, since, in the world of computers, anything that one man can do, scores if not hundreds can find, duplicate, and trace back to the originator.

The third improbability is that too many people in this book care. There is far too much commitment—to the job, to violence, to ideals, to sex. In fact, most people in most societies are too busy hanging on to get involved, yet Jeremiah, on a one-man basis, is able to create massive personal involvement. There are always people who care, people who will lay down their lives for an ideal—but not millions who will do so for a video image that appears now and then, and for less than a minute on each occasion.

A fourth improbability is that Allied Transcon is talented enough and sophisticated enough to develop starships and the most elaborate data-base techniques ever—and yet cannot track down the relatively simplistic techniques of Jeremiah?

The fifth improbability is the Chi Sequence itself. While the human genome project may indicate that it is possible, and may in fact exist, Kube-McDowell appears to exaggerate its historical impact through a selective re-analysis of history. Thus, Kube-McDowell reduces all history to an inexorable and predetermined blueprint, without ever allowing the possibility of human nature to surmount its own instincts and environment—a far too one-sided view of human nature.

Another improbability is the total lack of knowledge Chris has of his father, or his mother, or even his older sister. That's understandable in a fifteen-year-old, perhaps, but dubious in a twenty-seven-year-old man who has been in analysis for several years, and who was raised by his father and still maintains contact with him.

The final improbability is the economic impossibility of the society projected by Kube-McDowell. The energy requirements are absolutely staggering, and yet there are no environmental outbursts about such energy development. He cannot have it both ways. If an environmental sentiment is great enough to trigger riots across the globe, there must be evidence of prior to those riots. If prior environmental outrage does not exist, when there has to have been environmental damage of significant

Two Jules Feiffer cartoons sum up the dilemma faced by these four writers. One depicts an elderly American communist who, in the wake of the collapse of his ideology, insists he will spend the rest of his life in bed. It's not being so wrong that bothers him, he explains. What he can't bear is that the people he hates were right!

In the second cartoon, an intellectual recounts the silly and dangerous ideas about the Soviet Union held by "that fool, Reagan"; i.e., that it was an "evil empire" which would collapse trying to keep up with America in armaments. And now that it has collapsed, he knows Reagan had nothing to do with it. "Because if that fool, Reagan, was right all along—what kind of fool am I?"

I'm tempted to conclude: caught in history's iron-jawed trap, these four writers would rather chew off a lobe of their brains than admit they were wrong. But that is unnecessarily unkind. To a large extent these writers, dissenters in lockstep, are merely conforming to the views of their fellows in academia and publishing.

[I can only speak for myself, of course, but your position appears to be based on a large number of unfounded assumptions, presumptions, and misconceptions. You consistently misrepresent the positions of "the Left" (of which I am not wholly a member—I will not categorically identify myself with any particular platform of beliefs). For instance, it's not that "we" find the idea of "missiles aimed at missiles" more offensive than "missiles aimed at people"—it's that we want solutions that don't involve missiles at all. And what those writers who argue for restraint in our celebration over the downfall of communism wish is not for the return of failed "Marxist" systems, but for a safer, nonmilitary, nonpartisan, antinationalistic global perspective to emerge in place of the Cold War. They are afraid that victory, and the decades of singled-minded effort which preceded it, will have blotted from our minds the larger purposes for which we strove: not the victory of "capitalism" but that of the freedom of individual self-determination, the ideal our nation is properly founded on. (This confusion of goals is very clear in your letter.)

Those of us who instead point out the many problems that still face us (many of which, such as our eroded economy, our crumbling urban centers and dilapidated infrastructure, etc., were in large part caused by our prosecution of the Cold War itself) likewise do not call for the return of Soviet-style socialism, nor do we ignore the evidence that the Eastern Bloc was far worse in its mistreatment of the ecosystem. But simply because we in the West have not done as badly does not mean we have nothing to worry about. Your determination to quell any misgivings about the state of the environment only further illustrates the unfortunate confusion your euphoria over our victory has wrought.

Finally, a few personal points. I don't mind intelligent arguments over my stated positions—I welcome them—but many of your objections to my review are based on determined misreadings. For example, when dealing with Quinn's analysis of the Cain and Abel story, I specifically spent more time stating that it was but one possible interpretation, provocative but surely not defensible as a demonstrable historical fact. Your hypothesis might be supportable too, and equally provocative. Likewise, I tried to be very clear about the sort of benefits the "Taker" cultures offer, to show why the "Idyllic" Leaver peoples might be attracted to them; obviously, the "Takers" (like you capitalists) have "won" the war, but my point is, that being so, it will pay us to examine what we have won with this triumph, and how best to use it.

Your greatest error may be your most basic: you presume that the opinions you glean from our four reviews somehow evolved in "response" to recent political events; or that we four writers are simply following along with some nebulous "follies" of the "Left." But you have no evidence of the views we four writers have held over the past few years. You assume we now fear having to admit that we "were wrong"—but you cannot know what we thought. You seem to be using us to hammer away at a pet peeve based on gross generalizations. More to the point: at this early date, how can anyone be sure "we" have "won" anything at all? How can a whole ideology be "wrong"?

Ideologies are based on Ideals, which may flourish most when the wider world seems least hospitable to them (remember the Christians and the Romans).—RKK]

Alexei Solomakha, Minsk, Belarus

With its two editorials and some retrospective advice your magazine [NYRSF #40] looks perfectly complete, a touch of debate added by the Scaered column. I appreciated the reviews and have now a good starting-point idea of virtually all the books reviewed. May I say a few words about how I see three of them?

[The review of Sarah Canary by Karen Joy Fowler left me tense and disturbed. What sort of creatures are we and are we worth any contacting at all if the immediate figures we cut in front of the aliens are those of racists or their victims, murderers, amateur hangmen, asylum-keepers, strays, etc.? Something must be deeply wrong with the world if ordinary people are forced into ugly doings or images. So, the review provoked rather extra-literary thoughts in me.

I can't help being cautious about John Brunner's *A Maze of Stars*. Vastly of time and space infallibly endear readers to the subject but I know very few of writers whose powers of generalization and analysis can provide a worthy fill-in. What you have to say must equal what you show. Otherwise, against the wastes of infinite space every tiny blemish stands out and cries.

It was a short, sharp shock to read about Kim S. Robinson's book and I succumb to it without second thought. It emanates a great charm, both the plot and the language.

Earl Wells, Johnsonville, New York

I would like to call your attention to one fairly significant error that was introduced into my short essay on Orson Scott Card's review of *BAD* in the July issue (#47). On page seven, column one of the published version, the beginning of the ninth line reads:

seems to argue against credibility.

In my manuscript, that part of the line is as it should be:

seems to argue absolute credibility.

While the context of the quote is clear, the error still might have confused some readers. I hope the essay stimulates some responses. At the very least, I hope it encourages some readers who aren't familiar with Fussell to try him for themselves. That was the thing that bugged me the most about Card's review—the possibility that his readers would take his word and dismiss Fussell's work.

A NYRSF Primer

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The New Wave: A literary movement of British origin, formed in reaction to the Golden Age of SF, which emphasized literary and aesthetic values over scientific ones. It was at its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Everything was so much better then.

Cyberpunk: A North American literary movement that explores the possibilities of interface between humans and machines (esp. computers), generally anti-establishment in intent. It has been declared dead but does not seem to know this.

Pugaley: A short-lived lizard formerly belonging to Geoffrey Hartwell. Now a NYRSF mascot.

Slatterpunk, Steampunk, Mannerpunk, and Elfpunk: Literary sub-movements or non-movements named by people who really liked the sound of the term "cyberpunk"; respectively, they concerned gothic, Victorian England, High Fantasy, and Faeryland. In short: genre fiction produced by American Baby Boomers.

Postoffice: The means by which you receive the diploma that allows you to throw around terms like "postmodern" and "post-feminist."

It seems to me that when NYRSF was founded four years ago, these terms didn't need to be defined. Everything was so much better then.

—Gordon Van Gelder & the editors

A NTRSF Primer

After four years, it seems like the time has come to explain some of the terms we throw about in this magazine the way that high school students hurl rater tots and cheese balls across the cafeteria when the monitor isn't looking. Perhaps now you'll be able to follow the magazine (but don't count on it):

NTRSF: A strangely self-aware semi-professional magazine. The acronym rhymes (poorly) with "Unicef."

Postmodernism: A general and vague descriptive term for certain works of art (architecture principally) of the second half of the twentieth century. Its characteristics include a melding of popular and classical art forms, an acknowledgment of technology as a vital concern (virtually all postmodern art is post-A-bomb), and an emphasis on the uncommon person. It is also a new way to obviate the need for judging the merits of a work, i.e. if it's postmodern, it's got to be good. Quintessential postmodern artists include architect Robert Venturi and writers Thomas Pynchon and Kurt Vonnegut. **NTRSF** contributors are required to pay 25¢ for each use of the word.

Chip: Samuel R. Delany, author of *Dhalgren* and a guiding spirit of **NTRSF**. **Abv:** 1. A round flat disk used in cards for bidding. 2. A piece of computer hardware.

Deconstruction: Though this term originally had a narrow definition involving a willful reinterpretation of text through exceptionally close reading, it has come to refer to any act of critical interpretation in which close reading and essentializing are involved. Often used as a synonym for destruction, with which it rhymes.

Defenestration: What should be done to most people who use the term deconstruction without knowing what it means. This is the act of pushing someone out a window and has nothing to do with the maltreatment of rain forests in South America.

Genre: A topic of much debate and little definition. Generally speaking, a genre is a body of work sharing common assumptions ("conventions") and modes of expression ("tropes"). As Damon Knight pointed out some years ago, it is whatever you point at and call "genre." Often used as a synonym for "marketing category," which has no clever rhyme.

Parody: Sporadic attacks of literary terrorism. **Abv:** Criticism, perhaps the lowest form of flattery.

Esquire: A publicity organ for **NTRSF**.

The Ghetto: A literary enclave formed by the boundaries of genre. Speculative fiction, particularly science fiction, is a relatively recent art form and has traditionally felt relegated to the Ghetto by The Establishment.

The Establishment. **Standard definition:** Arbiters of taste, i.e. editors of and contributors to *The New York Times Book Review*. **Actual definition:** Anyone who thinks about what they read.

The Golden Age of Science Fiction: The age at which a reader first discovers science fiction, often the age of twelve. **Abv:** The late 1930s and 1940s, when John W. Campbell, Jr. was at his peak and science fiction was a literature of science and ideas and everything was so much better.

A Review: One reader's opinion as filtered through half a dozen editors.

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